

10 ways to get ripped like a gymnast

Triple Commonwealth Games champion Max Whitlock reveals ten fitness tips to help you get a body like a gold-medal-winning gymnast



Max Whitlock of Great Britain competes in the Pommel Horse Qualification on Day One of the Artistic Gymnastics World Championships in Belgium Photo: Getty Images



By Mark Bailey
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Following his **bronze medals on the pommel horse and in the men's team event at London 2012**, 21-year-old British gymnast Max Whitlock has made 2014 a year to remember. He began by taking gold on the pommel horse at the European Championships in Sofia in May, before **claiming three gold medals** in the floor, all-around and men's team events at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in July, as well as hoovering up a silver on the pommel horse and a bronze on the parallel bars.

The Hertfordshire-born athlete followed up his spectacular summer with a silver medal in the all-around event at the 2014 World Championships in Nanning in October, equalling Dan Keatings' 2009 result as the best performance in a world all-around competition by a British gymnast.

Here the 2014 British Olympic Association Gymnast of the Year shares ten training tips to help you get the body of a world-class gymnast.

1. USE YOUR OWN BODY AS A WEIGHT

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Exercises that require you to manoeuvre your own bodyweight are much better for developing the lean, functional muscle of an Olympic gymnast than those involving heavy lumps of metal.

"Most of gymnastics is about bodyweight exercises so you have to be able to lift your own weight in different situations," says Whitlock. "We want a lean and light frame but we also have to be strong."

To build real strength without unwanted bulk, switch to bodyweight exercises such as triceps dips, pull-ups, chin-ups, press-ups and leg raises.



2. COMPLETE THE SIX-PACK CIRCUIT

If you want the sculpted abs of a top British gymnast, you need to challenge your core muscles in as many ways as possible. “Before each training session we do a warm-up circuit which really works your mid-section from the front, the sides and the back,” explains Whitlock.

Although the Commonwealth Games star uses this routine for a simple warm-up, it will serve as a great abs workout for any amateur athlete in the gym. “The exercises include things like holds (e.g. planks), twists with a weighted plate, V-sits, rocking exercises (such as ‘the hollow rock’, in which you lie down, stretch out your arms and legs and rock gently forwards and backwards), sit-ups, and crunches with turns and twists. We do a minute of each exercise in the circuit.”

3. BECOME A LORD OF THE RING

If you’re going to master one piece of gymnastics apparatus which you haven’t touched since school, make it the rings.

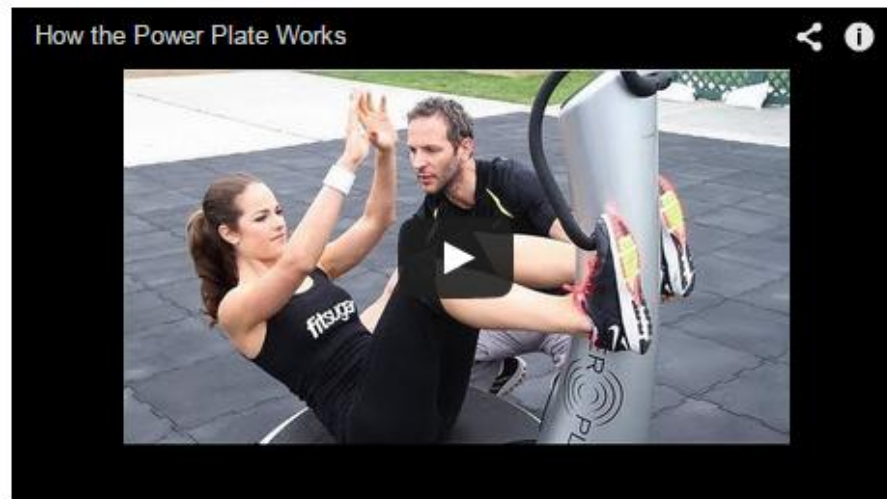
“The rings are a really good exercise for people to try in the gym because they don’t provide a solid base so your body has to use more muscles to perform the exercise and stay balanced,” explains Whitlock. “If you can learn to do chin-ups or leg raises on suspended rings you will be working your upper body, mid-section and legs all at the same time.”

For the ultimate gymnastics challenge, try to accomplish ‘the crucifix’ – a brutally hard exercise, also known as the ‘iron cross’, in which you straighten your arms horizontally as you suspend your body between two rings. “It’s really tough,” says Whitlock. “When I was learning to do the crucifix I worked a lot on my shoulder muscles to help support me.”

4. GOOD VIBRATIONS

To develop muscle and boost your balance and coordination at the same time, try squats, lunges, bridges and press-ups on a vibrating PowerPlate machine at your gym. The platform oscillates 25-50 times per second, forcing your muscles to repeatedly contract and relax in order to stay balanced and helping you to develop strength and stability in an extremely short workout time.

"Vibrating plates are really good for massaging your muscles too, but also for strengthening the little stabilising muscles around the main muscles for better balance," says Whitlock.



5. GET A LEG UP

If you enjoy working with machines or free weights in the gym, invest your time in the one body part everybody else ignores: the legs.

"When I go to the gym once a week I mainly do leg work," reveals Whitlock. "It's important for strengthening your knee joints and ankle joints ready for the landings we have to do, but also for building strength and power. The main exercises I do are leg presses and heel raises."

6. DON'T FORGET TO RUN

To maintain a lean frame you need to combine workout circuits and core routines with cardio training such as running, cycling, rowing or swimming. Even gymnasts hit the road: "Once a week we go on a four mile run to keep up our fitness so when we do our routine build-up our general stamina will be slightly higher than average," says Whitlock.

"Three weeks before a competition we also do a tough circuit in which we do 2-3 routines on each piece of apparatus – it's very intense and gives you a massive stamina build-up."

7. BE CONSISTENT

Whitlock trains six days a week for a total of 35 hours. You don't need to do the same volume to get great results, but what matters is the consistency with which you train. "Doing a little bit every day is what it's all about," says Whitlock. This can be a core workout, a strength session, a run or a short walk.

"It doesn't have to be loads or really intense but just regular exercise in moderation, like half an hour of something every day."



Max Whitlock performs on the rings during the Men's All-Around gymnastics competition at the Scottish Exhibition Conference Centre during the Commonwealth Games 2014 in Glasgow, Scotland

8. GIVE YOUR MUSCLES TIME TO RECOVER

Training regularly doesn't mean driving yourself to exhaustion. Gymnasts get plenty of rest in between each training session so that their bodies are fully repaired and recovered before their next workout.

"When I'm at home I am just resting and relaxing because recovery is half of the job," says Whitlock. "I always stretch after every workout too – it helps to repair the muscles so you're ready to go again the next day."

9. EAT HEALTHILY – BUT TREAT YOURSELF

To develop the body of a champion gymnast, aim for a high-protein, low-fat diet. "Food is as important as your training," says Whitlock, whose sample diet includes Weetabix for breakfast, pasta with tuna for lunch and mince with a jacket potato for dinner. "You have to get the protein in as it aids recovery so sometimes in the evening I will lower the carbs and put more meat on my plate." The gymnast has also honed the art of healthy snacking: "A cereal bar, a banana or some nuts and dried fruit is best."

However, the 21-year old still enjoys a post-event binge and believes it's crucial that you don't allow your diet to get too boring. "It's important to treat yourself and relax and eat what you want sometimes because it gets you in the right zone and the right frame of mind for when you start eating healthily again," says Whitlock.

10. ALWAYS HAVE A GOAL

If you find that your motivation levels ebb and flow over time, it's probably because you don't have a definable goal to keep you focused.

"My absolute best piece of training advice is to set a goal," says Whitlock. "I learnt that from my parents. If you haven't got a goal, everything seems like hard work. Set yourself a target and you will always have something to work towards and achieve."

Nissan are supporting Max on his road to Rio. To win a trip to Rio 2016, show your support at nissan.co.uk/RaceToRio. Follow @MaxWhitlock1