

Complete Guide to Using, Buying and Caring for Gymnastics Grips



A Special Report

by **Coach John Howard**

<http://GymnasticsZone.com/>

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Brands of Grips	5
What Kind of Grips are There?	7
Who Wears Grips?	8
Do I Need Grips?	8
Palm Grips	8
Which Grips Should Gymnasts Buy?	9
Where Do I Buy Grips?	10
Velcro vs. Buckle Grips	11
Dowel Grips vs. Non-Dowel Grips	11
Thick vs. Thin Leather Grips	11
Advantages to All Team Members Wearing the Same Grips	12
Back-Up Grips	12
Grip Sizing	13
Breaking In Your Grips	14
Grip Care	15
Grips and Rips Accessories	16
An Overall Look at Grips Through a Gymnast's Career	16

Introduction

Most high level gymnasts wear grips, including World Uneven Bar Champion and All-Around Olympic Champion Nastia Liukin and World Championship Bar Silver medallist Chellsie Memmel. USA gymnasts Nastia Liukin and Chellsie Memmel were first and second on bars at the World Championships and they both wear grips. It is likely that the best gymnasts on bars use grips and we would recommend you do the same.

There actually has been a little controversy on whether gymnasts should wear grips or not, since for a while, the high profile Russian gymnastics team under new coaching did not wear them. But now with the return of their traditional coaches and to more international success, they are again wearing grips.

Some of the Romanians do not wear grips, but it is because many gymnasts come from small clubs out in the country and cannot afford grips. By the time they qualify to the National program as a junior or senior, they don't want to change and relearn all the skills with grips.

A few other high profile International gymnasts do not wear grips, but most high level bar workers and virtually all male gymnasts wear them.

So gymnasts should get used to using grips early in their career because that is the most time efficient way to do it. In essence, you have to relearn skills, to some degree, when you switch to grips and having to relearn fewer skills is much more time efficient. If you do it now, you will have fewer skills to relearn (to readjust to doing with grips).

While gymnasts may not need grips for doing simple skills like doing kips, they will most likely want grips for learning and practicing skills like front and back giants and other circling skills on the bars. Gymnasts with small hands can actually catch release moves better with the dowel grips to help them clamp on and hold on better.

Dowel grips are designed with a wooden dowel positioned on the grips to help gymnasts have a better hold on the bar during circling skills and catching release moves. Many gymnasts have small hands, in relation to the size of the bar, and the dowel grip helps them maintain their grip on the bar better.

Grips are also useful for extending the amount of time you can work bars. If you want to be able to learn high level skills, you will have to be able to work bars for long periods of time. You will either have to learn to work through the pain of rips or wear grips in order to be able to spend enough time practicing on bars to learn high level skills.

Complete Guide to Using, Buying and Caring for Gymnastics Grips

The few high level gymnasts who do not wear grips often have to go through a period of ripping before their hands callous enough to stop ripping. Every time they take a break from gymnastics for any significant period of time, they have to go through the ripping cycle again before their hands toughen back up. Gymnasts who do not train bars every day will likely not get out of the period of ripping, since the off time works against the toughening process.

Almost all gymnasts get calluses and rips on their hands from doing bars. Gymnasts who wear grips only tend to get them around the edges of their grips and on their wrists from the straps. Gymnasts who don't wear grips get calluses all over their hands directly on the parts of the hands that need to hold onto the bar.

Callused hands or callused areas of the hand often rip bigger than non-callused areas. Rips often take off the whole callus when the hands rip. The callus comes off in one whole piece. Gymnasts who don't wear grips can have this happen over their whole hand area, not just around where their grips are. So when they rip, gymnasts who don't wear grips are likely to rip in more areas and have bigger rips in the sensitive areas of the hands that grips usually cover.

Summer, the off-season, is the ideal time to get used to wearing grips as opposed to switching to grips in the middle of the competition season. It can be difficult to make a change to grips in the middle of a season and trying to compete when grips feel unfamiliar.

As gymnasts get older and grow, they tend to switch to wearing grips because their hands rip more when they are taller and weigh more. It is easier to learn to wear grips when you are younger and at a lower level of bar difficulty skills than to switch later. If you think it is hard to get used to grips doing kips, you will really have trouble later switching to grips and getting used to them doing skills like giant pirouettes and release moves.

It is easier to learn to wear grips doing simple skills than to have to change later. It is very likely a wiser choice to get used to grips now rather than later.

In the meantime, we use tea tree oil products to heal any rips (usually in only about two to three days). Gymnasts can also put those tea tree oil products on their hands overnight to start to heal rips before they actually happen. If you don't have access to tea tree oil products, Preparation H (yeah, we know) also works. But when using Preparation H overnight gymnasts might want to wear gloves because of the smell and it would not be good if a gymnast were to suck their thumb while wearing it at night - lol.

Brands of Grips

There are a number of brands of gymnastics grips. Each brand and type of grips has special characteristics that may or may not appeal to certain gymnasts.

Ten. 0 or 10.0 Grips

<http://www.ten-o.com/xq/asp/deptId.96/PAGE.1/ID.2849/qx/product.htm>

This brand of grips is sold by the accessory arm of the GMR Gymnastics company. They sell the entire range of grips and a complete line of accessories and hand care products.

Ten. 0 basically has four styles of women's competition grips – Pixie Grips, 501 Blues, Classic 10.0 Grips and Tensport (Reisport style) Grips.

Pixie Grips

Pixie grips are for young girls and smaller gymnasts, are lightweight, easy to break in and get used to, have shorter and come in the smaller sizes – Size 000, Size 00, Size 0 and Size 1. They come in both velcro and buckle styles. \$29.50 - \$33.00

501 Blues Uneven Bar Velcro Dowel Gymnastics Grips

These grips are designed to break in easily, have a tapered palm piece, stitched-on dowel soft wrist padding and foam wrist inserts. They come in sizes 0, 1, 2 and 3. \$36.50 - \$39.50

Classic 10.0 Velcro Uneven Bar Grips

Because this is made out of white split grain heavier-duty leather for powerful gymnasts. This grip takes longer to break in than thinner but is more durable and lasts longer. It has a straight, slightly tapered palm piece design that covers more of the hand. It only comes in a Velcro hook and loop strap and has padded foam wrist inserts. It comes in sizes 0, 1, 2 and 3. For some reason, probably because these are likely their most popular grips, 10.0 does not offer any quantity discounts on Classic Grips. \$39.50

Tensport Uneven Bar Velcro Dowel Gymnastics Grips

Tensport Velcro grips are designed to have the same features, like the finger hole tabs hold fingers in place, a straight palm piece and stitched on dowel, as the internationally known Swiss Reisport Grips, but they are made from the lighter easier to break-in 501 leather. While they say it lasts as long as Reisport leather, since it is not as thick, that may or may not happen. It is less expensive than than the Reisport Grip. It comes in sizes 0, 1, 2 and 3. \$36 - \$39.50

Complete Guide to Using, Buying and Caring for Gymnastics Grips

U.S. Glove Grips

U.S. Glove has 7 grip styles including a Nastia Liukin brand, their Hot Shots, Millenium, RKO, Omega, Regular and Elite.

Hot Shot Grips

This is U.S. Gloves original style of grips. These grips are specially designed for small gymnasts with tiny hard-to-fit hands. These grips come with Velcro closures, buckle styles, sewn on leather wrapped dowel with and without leather cuffs and a finger locking system to help keep gymnast's fingers from slipping out of the finger holes. They recommend this style for gymnasts that are 70 Lbs. Some models of these grips may require the use of wristbands. They come in sizes 000, 00, 0 and 1. \$29.95 - \$34.00 Nastia Grips are a version of Hot Shot Grips with a pink Nastia logo and cost a few dollars more.

Millenium Grips

These grips come with Velcro closures, buckle styles, sewn on leather wrapped dowel with and without leather cuffs and a finger locking system to help keep gymnast's fingers from slipping out of the finger holes. Some models of these grips may require the use of wristbands. They come in sizes 00, 0, 1, 2 3 and 4. \$34.00 - \$36.95

RKO Grips

This is the US Gloves version of Reisport grips. RKO = Reisport Knock Offs? They have a Velcro and a buckle version of the grips and neither has padded wrist supports so wrist pads are going to be a necessity. They come in sizes 00, 0, 1, 2 3 and 4. \$34.00 - \$36.95

Regular Grips

Women's Regular Grips are basic sets of grips without padded wrist supports or the finger locking system. They have a Velcro and a buckle version of the grips. They come in sizes 00, 0, 1, 2 3 and 4. \$34.00 - \$36.95

Elite Grips

Elite Grips are constructed with the same leather we use on their men's elite handgrips. They clearly state that these hand grips are extremely difficult to break in and should only be purchased when a gymnast wears out from regular models of grip. This model uses their original dowel set-up.

Bailie Grips

This is an old school traditional grip company whose grips are often characterized as long-lasting and heavier leather. They have three women's models - a one buckle, two buckle and Velcro versions. The Velcro version has a padded wrist support. \$34.95 - \$36.95

Reisport Grips

Reisport Elite Protec Lady Gymnastics Grip

The Reisport Protec grip versions are made from a leather laminate that is supposed to be triple the strength of ordinary leather and stretch less which helps with sizing concerns. They have Velcro versions and buckle versions Reisport grips are internationally known, respected and much copied and more expensive. They come in sizes 00, 0, 1, 2 and 3. \$41.95 - \$60.00

What Kind of Grips are There?

There are three main types of women's uneven bar grips. There are beginner palm grips, Velcro closure grips and buckle closure grips. Men have different kinds of grips for different events - high bar, rings and for some gymnasts p-bars.

Palm grips simply provide friction protection to help protect against rips. They do not have dowels, so they do not help with a grip.

Once gymnasts are swinging skills at or approaching horizontal, dowel grips are useful for improving the ability to grip the bars. Dowel grips come with either Velcro closures or buckle straps.

Some grips come with built in foam wrist protectors. Other grips do not and usually require separate wristbands.

Grips have many variables which give gymnasts many choices, including thickness of leather, width of the palm leather, shape of the palm leather, softness of the leather, finger hole flaps, finger locking systems, colors, wrist padding options, etc. There are often too many choices for new gymnasts to know which to pick.

Who Wears Grips?

There are primarily two reasons to wear grips. One to help protect the hands from rips and the other is to use the dowel in dowel grips to help hold onto the bars.

For younger, newer gymnasts, grips can provide assistance to the process of toughening the hands in a more progressive manner and with fewer or no rips. Bigger gymnasts experience more friction on their hands in circling skills so they often use grips for that reason.

For both younger gymnasts with small hands and older, bigger and gymnasts doing bigger skills, dowel grips can help maintain a better grip during circling skills and help clamp down when catching release moves.

Grip use and grip choice varies considerably from gymnast to gymnast, though. Gymnasts start using grips at different ages, levels and for different reasons. In general, the vast majority of gymnasts at the competitive level wear grips.

Do I Need Grips?

If you are getting more and more rips and it is getting to the point where it is interfering with your bar training, then that is one clear sign that it is time to consider getting grips. If you are definitely going to start or continue a gymnastics competitive career and you don't want to have to relearn a lot of skills with grips, then you should consider grips. And if you are starting to do circling skills like giants or even swinging at or above the level of the bar, dowel grips are a safety grip consideration.

Palm Grips

Palm grips are capable of helping to cut down on rips, but most beginner gymnasts do not do enough bars to get used to using the grips. Unless gymnasts are doing enough bars or their hands easily rip, most young beginner gymnasts will never get used to using the palm grips. It is very common to see newly purchased palm grips taken off after the first few minutes of using them, because the gymnasts don't feel comfortable on the bars using them. And they may never get used to them unless or until they are doing a lot more bar training as a higher level gymnast. So unless rips are a big problem, beginner gymnasts may be wasting their money on palm grips.

Which Grips Should Gymnasts Buy?

In general, I prefer to recommend lightweight leather, easy to break in, Velcro grips, with a built-in finger lock in system. They are lighter weight, easier to break in, give a better feel for the bars and are less expensive.

Many coaches and gymnasts are very particular about which grips they want. To some degree it is true that gymnasts can and will adapt to any grips over a period of time. It is also true that when first wearing grips, it is a big adjustment for gymnasts to make changing from bare hands to grips. In general, it is too expensive and time consuming to try, break-in and test each type of grips, so gymnasts tend to use the grips their friends or coach recommend. There is nothing wrong with doing that.

I prefer my gymnasts to wear grips that are easy to break in. They may not last as long by some measure of time but grips that are ready to use virtually from the time you buy them are my first choice.

Where Do I Buy Grips?

Gyms do not usually stock grips because there are too many sizes and different brands. There is also not much of a profit margin on gyms selling grips so it makes no business sense to carry a huge inventory.

Most gyms and coaches simply help parents order online to make sure gymnasts get the right size. Some gyms will make a small profit (about 10%) if they have or purchase a certain minimum amount of grips. It is certainly not a significant amount of revenue.

So you will either be buying your grips from your local gym where you can try them on or you and your coach will be ordering them online.

[U.S. Glove Grips](#)

[10.0 Gymnastics Grips](#)

[DGS Gym Supply](#)

[Gibson Athletic](#)

[American Gymnastics](#)

[GymShorts.com](#)

[AAA Grips](#) - Panfilof & Daughters LLC

[GS Super Grips](#)

[Academy Grips](#)

[Grips Etc](#)

Companies that make grips themselves can also custom make them exactly the way you want them.

Velcro vs. Buckle Grips

While grip companies now often use Velcro that is tested for up to 10,000 uses, Velcro can lose its ability to hook and stay hooked given the extreme pressures during high level circling and release skills. The chance that Velcro grips could come loose during a critical high difficulty skill leads some gymnasts to purchase and use buckle grips.

Because Velcro grips are so much easier to undo and readjust, like between turns in a gymnastics bar practice, far more gymnasts prefer Velcro grips. A number of gymnasts, coaches and grip companies have devised ways to hold Velcro grips on more securely during competitions and practices, ranging from rubber bands, monofilament string, finger hole flaps to taping.

Bigger gymnasts, like men for example, may like buckle and double buckle grips because they may be able to tighten down tighter and therefore slide up and down the wrist less. Buckle grips usually don't have built-in wrist pads so gymnasts will have to buy those separately.

Dowel Grips vs. Non-Dowel Grips

There are few companies investing too much time in non-dowel grips any more. Some still try to sell them as a step between no grips and dowel grips. But for small women's hands trying to hold on to an uneven bar, dowel grips have a distinct advantage. And if a gymnast's level of gymnastics and hands are big enough for grips, there seems to be no advantage to wasting time with non-dowel grips.

Thick vs. Thin Leather Grips

In general, grips made from thicker, heavier leather take longer to break in and also tend to last longer. Thinner, lighter leather grips break in easily but theoretically tend to wear out and tear more quickly. My personal choice is using lighter leather grips because they break in quickly and less practice time is lost breaking in grips. Since thinner lighter grips are also usually less expensive, I think any supposed advantage of lasting longer is offset by the lower cost and faster break-in time.

Advantages to All Team Members Wearing the Same Grips

It is not uncommon for coaches to recommend, suggest or strenuously recommend that all their gymnasts wear some kind of grip or another. While coaches may have a definite opinion, gymnasts are the ones wearing the grips and every gymnast should be comfortable with the grips they are wearing.

There are some advantages to almost everyone on a team buying the same kind of grips or at least from the same company. Either the gymnast, gym or the coach may be able to take advantage of quantity discounts when ordering grips all from the same supplier.

There likely will be someone in the gym, or the gym may have one full set of grips in all of the sizes, so that gymnasts can try on the actual grips they are considering buying to get the all-important fit correct.

Having the whole team wear the same grips also makes it possible that if a gymnast forgets their grips for an important meet, that one of the other gymnasts on their team will have grips or back-up grips that fit that they can borrow.

Back-Up Grips

Serious gymnasts, meaning gymnasts who compete in serious competitions, should have a set of back-up grips that are already broken in. Imagine that you are at the most important meet of your life and in warm-ups, your grips completely tear through. Without a set of back-up grips that are broken in, you are left to compete without grips, borrow a pair and compete with unfamiliar grips or grips broken in for someone else or scratch bars.

While buying two sets of grips is obviously more expensive, if a gymnast's hands are not growing, over time the two sets of grips will last almost as long as buying two sets one after another.

It is equally important that if a gymnast does have a back-up set of grips that they be broken in already when they are needed for emergency use. Especially if the grips are made from the thicker leather that is harder to break in, it will be almost as useless to have a back up set of grips that are not broken in as it would be to not have a back-up set at all.

Grip Sizing

Grip sizing is important because the wrong type of grips (ring grips being used on high bar) or the wrong size of grips can be a serious danger for the safety of gymnasts. The wrong grips or the wrong size of grips can lock on the bar so that the gymnast rotates but their wrists do not. This is not a common injury but it is a severe and painful injury, so careful care should be taken in the sizing of grips. Grips that are too large can get in the way and make it more difficult to catch the bar.

When gymnasts receive their grips they should try them on. When they are wearing the grips, with the grip holes on their first knuckle, the angle between their hand and fingers should be 45 to 60 degrees. If the angle is more than 60 degrees, the grips are too long and could lock up on the bar. If the angle is at 60 degrees, the grips may still be too long when they stretch out from use, which is more likely to happen with bigger gymnasts or lighter leather.

Grips have a definite right-hand and left-hand grip. If the top of the grip is slanted higher, generally, that side of the grip should go toward the thumb of the hand. For other grips, read the instructions that come with the grips because each company can be different in this regard. Make sure you have the grips right side out. If you are unsure, ask your coach for help in how to put them on to test them for size.

It is very important to note and understand that each brand of grip has its own sizing system. There is no universal system for the sizing of grips. While all grip companies have gymnasts (or coaches) measure the hand (the underside - palm up) in the same way - the number of inches from the heel of the hand to the tip of the middle finger. The size of grip (which range from 000 to a 4) will vary enough that you can't just say "Oh, my daughter used to wear a 2."

Coaches are and should be the best ones to do the measuring of grips since over a number of years they will be the only ones who can gain enough experience to make the call if measurements don't exactly match the sizing on the grip company charts. In general, if there is not an exact match, gymnast should order the smaller size since grips will stretch with use.

Even after measuring a gymnast's hand to size grips, such a flat one-dimensional measurement cannot guarantee the right size, so gymnasts will need to check when their grips arrive to see if the grips are truly right for them. Gymnasts used to send drawings of their hands in when they ordered grips, but I don't believe any of the companies do that any more.

Complete Guide to Using, Buying and Caring for Gymnastics Grips

Grip companies will allow you to return grips that don't fit if they are in resaleable condition. Basically that means you can try them on, but not use or chalk them and wash your hands before you try them on so you don't get them dirty. Grip companies don't take liability responsibility for incorrectly sized grips. They say gymnasts and their coaches must check them after they are received and before they are used on bars. It makes sense then that gymnasts get their coaches to check the fit.

Breaking In Your Grips

All grips are going to require some break-in time before you can go all out and do all of your skills using them. Most gymnasts break in grips just by swinging. If gymnasts can do basic gymnastics warm-ups and bar drills wearing new grips, minimal bar practice time is lost.

The purpose of breaking in grips is to both form them to the individual's hand and form them to the bars. Grips start out with a straight flat piece of leather and should end up after the break in period to be curved to exactly fit the gymnast's hand and the type of bar they train on.

If you are breaking in a back-up set of grips, wear them doing basic bar warm-ups and then switch to do the harder skills in your bar practice. Do this until the grips are broken in and then you can store them until you need them.

Don't do any skills during which you feel out of control because of the grips. Take your time and be smart so as to avoid injury when breaking in your grips.

You can also help grips to be broken in by storing them correctly. They can be wrapped around a short dowel the same thickness as a bar overnights. Put them in the same position around the bar that they would be if you are wearing them and rubber band them into place. We always had those bar size sections cut up in the gym. You can do the same break-in process (wrapping them up with a rubber band in the correct hand position) without the bar.

The correct finger hole size is also part of the fit and breaking in process. The finger holes may be either too big or too small. If the finger holes are too big, you can use a combination of foam or tape to make them smaller and or use a rubber band to help hold them in place. My favorite product for solving this problem are foam finger wedgies which can be ordered from GymnasticExpress.co.uk

Complete Guide to Using, Buying and Caring for Gymnastics Grips

If the grip finger holes are too small, first of all, remember that the finger holes will stretch with use just like the grips will stretch. You don't want to make finger holes that were too small to big and have the reverse problem. The finger holes can be sanded with rolled-up sandpaper or filed with a small round file. Do not cut the grip holes or pull on the holes to stretch them as this can lead to tearing later. You should initially just make your grip holes just big enough so your fingers don't turn blue, but leave them tight so they can stretch to the right size.

Grip Care

Gymnastics grip companies guarantee their products, but they all sorts of conditions that can void the warranty. Some of those apply to how you care for your grips. Grip companies say not to put water on your grips as it can cause them to rot and get stiff. Thousands of gymnasts pay no attention to that and carefully spray and mix water and chalk on their grips to their own perfect mix.

Especially if you put water on your grips, you will want to check them daily before you use them for rips or tears, problems with the stitching and to make sure they have not stretched and become too long (the 45 - 60 degree test). If you see problems, take the safe route and start wearing your back-up grips or at least order new grips immediately.

Many gymnasts will want to brush the caked-on chalk off their grips from time to time using a grip brush. Brush across the grip, not up and down. This is a good care of the grips but don't brush the stitching of the grips and potentially and don't brush off the stitching and weaken it.

You will want to store your grips in a clean, dry grip bag to keep from getting chalk on everything else in your gym bag or locker.

Ten O Gymnastics has an 10.0 [Gymnastics Grip Guide](#) for their grips and accessories.

Grips and Rips Accessories

- Grip bag
- Cotton wristbands
- Foam Neoprene wristbands
- Magnesium Carbonate chalk
- Grip brush
- Finger wedgies
- Athletic tape
- Prewrap
- Tuff-Skin spray
- Spenco Blister Relief pads
- 2nd Skin Blister pads
- 2nd Skin Smart wound dressing
- Portable chalk bag
- Tea Tree oil
- Medicated hand balm
- Grip Dog Cedar Anti-Bacterial
- Tite grip anti-perspiration formula
- Mini rip kit hydrogel skin pads
- Spray bottle
- Strap bar straps

An Overall Look at Grips Through a Gymnast's Career

During a beginner gymnast's career, most gymnasts will not wear grips of any type and will do bars barehanded. Some beginner gymnasts who may have coaches who have them do an above average amount of bars or who have tender hands may want to wear palm grips.

When a gymnast first starts to seriously train for competition, they should consider getting dowel grips. They likely should first start with the lightest leather, easiest to break in dowel grips possible. The reason for starting to wear grips this early in a career is that wearing grips and not wearing grips is so different that any skills learned without grips will have to be relearned, at least to some extent, with grips. That makes it a good idea to start wearing grips before learning too many skills that would then have to be relearned.

Complete Guide to Using, Buying and Caring for Gymnastics Grips

As a gymnast grows, gets bigger and does increasingly harder high torque skills, they may choose to wear thicker grips that take a little longer to break in but will also hold up to more big skills and last longer. Thicker grips are also less likely to tear during a competition. Then again a gymnast may choose to always wear thinner dowel grips so she has a better “feel” for the bars.