

A Parallette Training Guide

by Jay Thornton

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Introduction

With a more than 20 years of experience in gymnastics, we at American Gymnast have experienced every aspect of the sport. From beginner gymnasts to World Championship Team Members, including coaching at all levels, judging, and running a gymnastics business, **we have insight to offer everyone** involved in the sport. We have lived and breathed gymnastics every day of our lives since we were 8 years old. Now, we want to pass that insight on to you!

We are excited to provide you, **completely free**, our article entitled *Success Begins at Home - A Parallette Training Guide*. What really separates the good gymnasts from the great gymnasts is not what you do inside the gym, but what you do outside the gym. During normal practice, there are only so many hours to work your skills and routines on each piece of equipment. Many times athletes and coaches get so bogged down with trying to learn a particular skill or prepare routines for competition that the *basics* of gymnastics are neglected. Gymnasts at every level need to continuously refine their basics — and much of the refinement can be done at home, saving time in the gym for learning higher-level skills.

From our experience, we have found that the single most important piece of men's equipment for training at home is a set of parallettes. It's astounding the number of exercises that can be performed on this one piece of equipment alone. If you are not familiar with what parallettes are, these are a miniature version of the men's parallel bars. L-sits, planches, and handstands are essentials of gymnastics that every gymnast must perfect, and these are **just a few** of the elements gymnasts can perform safely at home on a set of parallettes.

In our guide, we provide an exercise regimen according to your gymnastics level. But remember, our training guide is just that - a guide. Every gymnast is unique, so depending on individual strength and ability, you may find the need to vary or adapt the reps, times, or the exercises themselves. We recommend that your gymnast follow this guide an average of 3 times per week.

Feel free to print the guide to have to look at as you train. And, as always in gymnastics, training should be done only with proper matting and under the supervision of a safety certified coach or adult.

So, let's get started. Good luck!

Jay Thornton

World Championship Team Member
American Gymnast

Beginner

Tuck Sit

3-5 sets of 10 sec.



Knees together and tight against chest

**Back should be vertical with
shoulders directly over hands**

Hips slightly in front of hands

Head stays in neutral position

L Sit

3-5 sets of 10 sec.



Legs and hips just at or slightly above bar height

Hips extended so they are even with the hands

Legs should be parallel with bars and floor

Tuck Planche

3-5 sets of 10 sec.



Knees together and tight against chest

Push down in shoulders

Round back position

Straddle Press to Handstand Against Wall

2 sets of 3-5 reps.

1	2	3	4
			
<p>Start with feet on bars and hands placed on bars slightly away from wall</p> <p>Shoulders lean forward in front of hands until against wall</p>	<p>Continue to lean forward until upper back, just at base of neck, is against wall</p> <p>Press with head in until body rolls up against the wall</p>	<p>Maintain wide straddle until back and hips are completely against wall</p>	<p>Bring feet together slowly to handstand position</p> <p>Press down to starting position (feet on bars) reversing the procedure</p>

Handstand Against Wall

2 reps. of 30 sec.

place parallettes against a wall



Hands should be as close to wall as possible while still maintaining balance

Back, shoulders, & head should be in a straight line away from wall

Maintain slight hollow chest position with stomach sucked in

Slight arch is allowed in lower body to rest against wall

Push down in shoulders

Head in neutral position

Eyes look through eyebrows at a spot on the floor between the hands

Handstand Pushups Against Wall

2 sets of 5–7 reps



Upper body stays straight or slightly hollow

Slight arch in lower body is allowed to place feet on wall

Arms should bend 90 degrees

Tight body position should be maintained while pressing back up to the handstand

Push-ups

2 sets of 7-10 reps

1



Starting position should be done with hollow chest and straight line in lower body

Lean forward until shoulders are directly over the hands on the parallelles

2



Parallelles should be slightly wider than shoulder-width apart

Keep body tight and in a straight line as you press downward in the pushup

3



In the "down" position, the chest should go at least to the tops of the parallelles

4



When pushing up, the body should finish in starting position 1 with the back in the rounded, hollow position

Handstand Forward 1/2 Pirouettes

5-7 reps

1	2	3
 <p>Kick all the way to handstand before initiating first 1/4 turn</p>	 <p>Bodyweight shifts on top (or slightly inside) bar being stepped to</p> <p>Head stays neutral throughout pirouette</p>	 <p>Shoulders stay directly over hands throughout pirouette</p> <p>Tight lower back and buttocks maintained throughout pirouette</p>

Intermediate

L Sit

3-5 sets of 20 sec.



Legs and hips just at or slightly above bar height

Hips extended so they are even with the hands

Legs should be parallel with bars and floor

V Sit

3-5 sets of 10 sec.



Lean back slightly past vertical so shoulders are just behind hands

Hips slightly in front of hands

Head stays in neutral position

Shins as close to face as possible

Tuck Planche

3-5 sets of 15 sec.



Knees together and tight against chest

Push down in shoulders

Round back position

Lean so shoulders are in front of hands

Tuck Planche to Straddle Planche

3–5 sets of 5 sec.



Starting from tuck planche, extend legs to straddle planche

Lean shoulders slightly farther forward than tuck planche



Maintain slightly hollow chest position

Maintain as wide a straddle as possible

Body should be parallel with floor

(hold is on the straddle planche)

L Sit Press to Tuck or Straddle Planche

3-5 reps

hold final planche position a minimum of 3 seconds

1	2	3	4
 <p>Start in L-sit position</p>	 <p>Press hips up maintaining slightly hollow chest position</p> <p>Can go to tuck planche here, or continue pressing to straddle planche</p>	 <p>Begin leaning forward</p> <p>Wait to straddle until feet pass through vertical position</p>	 <p>Continue leaning forward and straddle as wide as possible</p> <p>Tighten stomach muscles and buttocks</p>

Straddle Press to Handstand (no wall)

2 sets of 5-7 reps in a row

1



Start from standing on floor
Lean forward until shoulders are slightly in front of hands

2



Press hips up with head in until body rolls up with back and hips directly over hands

Maintain wide straddle until in a straddle handstand

3



Bring feet together slowly to handstand position

Press down to starting position (feet on floor) reversing the procedure

Pike Press to Handstand Against Wall

2 sets of 5-7 reps in a row

1



Hands are placed on bars slightly away from wall

Shoulders lean forward in front of hands until against wall

Continue to lean forward until upper back, just at base of neck, is against wall

2



Keep legs as close to chest as possible until hips are over the head

3



Continue pressing with head in until body rolls up against the wall to handstand position

Press down to starting position (feet on floor) reversing the procedure

Handstand

2 reps for 60 sec.



Feet, hips, back, shoulders, head, & hands should be in a straight line

Maintain slight hollow chest position with stomach sucked in

Push down in shoulders

Eyes look through eyebrows at a spot on the floor between the hands

Handstand Pushups Against Wall

2 sets of 10–12 reps



Upper body stays straight or slightly hollow

Slight arch in lower body is allowed to place feet on wall

Arms should bend at least 90 degrees

Body position should be maintained while pressing back up to the handstand

Planche Push-ups

2 sets of 15–20 reps

1		<p>Place hands on parallelles and feet on object such as a table, couch, or stack of books until body is parallel with floor</p> <p>Lean forward until shoulders are in front of the hands on the parallelles</p>
2		<p>Parallelles should be slightly wider than shoulder-width apart</p> <p>Parallelles should be straight or turned slightly outward</p>
3		<p>In the "down" position, the chest should go at least to top of parallelles</p>
4		<p>When pushing up, the body should finish in starting position 1 with the back rounded and hollow</p>

Handstand Forward 1/1 Pirouettes

5-7 reps

1	2	3
		
<p>Kick all the way to handstand before initiating first 1/4 turn</p>	<p>Bodyweight shifts on top (or slightly inside) bar being stepped to</p> <p>Head stays neutral throughout pirouette</p>	<p>Shoulders stay on top of hands throughout pirouette</p> <p>Tight lower back and buttocks maintained throughout pirouette</p> <p>Repeat the same procedure for second half of pirouette</p>

Handstand Reverse 1/2 Pirouettes

5-7 reps

1



Kick all the way to handstand before initiating first 1/4 turn

2



Bodyweight shifts on top (or slightly inside) of bar being stepped to

Slight arch maintained in lower body during pirouette

3



Shoulders stay on top of hands throughout pirouette

Tight lower back and buttocks maintained throughout pirouette

Advanced

NOTE: There are advanced exercises listed in this guide that may require the assistance of a spotter for the gymnast to complete

L Sit

3 sets x 30 sec.



Legs and hips just at or slightly above bar height

Hips extended so they are even with the hands

Legs should be parallel with bars and floor

V Sit

3-5 sets x 15 sec.



Lean back slightly past vertical so shoulders are just behind hands

Hips slightly in front of hands

Head stays in neutral position

Shins as close to face as possible

Straddle Press to Handstand (no wall)

2 sets of 5-7 reps in a row

start from L Sit

1	2	3	4
			
<p>From L Sit, press hips up & lean forward until shoulders are slightly in front of hands</p>	<p>Press hips up, with head in, until body rolls up with back and hips directly over hands</p> <p>Wait to begin straddling legs until feet have completely cleared bars</p>	<p>Maintain wide straddle until in a straddle handstand</p>	<p>Bring feet together slowly to handstand position</p> <p>Press down to starting position (L Sit) reversing the procedure</p>

Pike Press to Handstand (no wall)

2 sets of 5-7 reps in a row

start from L Sit

1	2	3
 <p>From L Sit, press hips up & lean forward until shoulders are slightly in front of hands Keep legs as close to chest as possible</p>	 <p>Press hips up, with head in, until body rolls up with back and hips directly over hands</p>	 <p>Continue pressing legs from pike handstand position all the way to the handstand Press down to starting position (L Sit) reversing the procedure</p>

Broomstick Presses

5-7 reps

1	2	3	4	5
				
<p>Tape broomstick across top of parallel bars</p> <p>Place hands in front of broomstick (same exercise can be performed with hands behind broomstick to make harder)</p>	<p>From L-sit, press hips up & lean forward until shoulders are slightly in front of hands</p>	<p>Push down in shoulders and suck feet into chest until feet pass over broomstick</p> <p>Wait to begin straddling legs until feet have completely cleared bars</p>	<p>Continue pressing until body rolls up with back and hips directly over hands</p> <p>Maintain wide straddle until in a straddle handstand</p>	<p>Bring feet together slowly together to handstand position</p> <p>Press down back over broomstick to starting position (L Sit) reversing the procedure</p>

L Sit Press to Straddle Planche

5-7 reps

hold each planche at least 3 sec.

1	2	3	4
 <p>Start in L-sit position</p>	 <p>Press hips up maintaining slightly hollow chest position</p>	 <p>Begin leaning forward Wait to straddle until feet pass through vertical position</p>	 <p>Continue leaning forward and straddle as wide as possible Tighten stomach muscles and buttocks</p>

Straight-body Planche (feet together & on a box)

3-5 sets of 15 sec.

	<p>Place hands on parallettes and feet on object such as a table, couch, or stack of books until body is parallel with floor</p> <p>Lean shoulders forward as far as possible while maintaining support</p> <p>Maintain slightly hollow chest position</p> <p>Press hands down into parallettes, trying to lift feet off of supporting block</p>
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Straddle Planche Press to Handstand

3-5 reps

1	2	3	4	5
				
<p>From straddle planche, push down into the bars and begin pressing body upward</p>	<p>Maintain planche position and continue pressing until hips are directly over shoulders & hands</p>		<p>From straddle handstand position, slowly bring feet together to the handstand</p>	

Handstand

2 sets for 90 sec.



Feet, hips, back, shoulders, head, & hands should be in a straight line

Maintain slight hollow chest position with stomach sucked in

Push down in shoulders

Eyes look through eyebrows at a spot on the floor between the hands

Handstand Pushups (no wall)

2 sets of 10–12 reps.

1



Entire body stays straight with slight hollow position in the chest

2



Arms should bend and lower body to where head is just above the floor

3



Tight body position should be maintained while pressing back up to the handstand

Planche Push-ups

2 sets of 20–25 reps

1		<p>Place hands on parallelles and feet on object such as a table, couch, or stack of books until body is parallel with floor</p> <p>Lean forward until shoulders are in front of the hands on the parallelles</p>
2		<p>Parallelles should be slightly wider than shoulder-width apart</p> <p>Parallelles should be straight or turned slightly outward</p>
3		<p>In the "down" position, the chest should go below the parallelles</p>
4		<p>When pushing up, the body should finish with the back in the rounded, hollow position.</p>

Handstand Forward 1/1 Pirouettes

5-7 reps

1	2	3
 <p>Kick all the way to handstand before initiating first 1/4 turn</p>	 <p>Bodyweight shifts on top (or slightly inside) bar being stepped to</p> <p>Head stays neutral throughout pirouette</p>	 <p>Shoulders stay on top of hands throughout pirouette</p> <p>Tight lower back and buttocks maintained throughout pirouette</p> <p>Repeat the same procedure for second half of pirouette</p>

Handstand Reverse 1/1 Pirouettes

5-7 reps

1	2	3
 <p>Kick all the way to handstand before initiating first 1/4 turn</p>	 <p>Bodyweight shifts on top (or slightly inside) of bar being stepped to</p> <p>Slight arch maintained in lower body during pirouette</p>	 <p>Shoulders stay on top of hands throughout pirouette</p> <p>Tight lower back and buttocks maintained throughout pirouette</p> <p>Repeat the same procedure for second half of pirouette</p>

Tips

If you are trying to decide how to choose the right set of parallelles to buy, there are several points to consider. When you look at different sets, be sure to inquire about the following characteristics:

Length - One of the key exercises on a set of parallelles is a pirouette. The parallelles should be long enough for the gymnast to safely perform this exercise. Unfortunately, a lot of parallelles on the market are not built with this exercise in mind. Most are built for "pressing exercises," which do not require much length. But, pirouettes are essential to the development of a gymnast's basics and need to be incorporated in their daily workout.

So, how long is long enough? At a minimum, each parallelle should be slightly longer than the gymnast's shoulder width. Each step on a pirouette should be about shoulder-width apart, so the parallelles need to be long enough to accommodate this.

Height - When looking at the best height for your set of parallelles, several exercises should be considered. Parallelles should be high enough for beginners to do L-sits and for advanced gymnasts to do handstand pushups. When a beginner does an L-sit, they may not yet be strong enough to hold their legs up parallel with the bars. Their legs will usually dip below the bars, so if the bars are not high enough the gymnast will not be able to keep his feet off the ground.

Advanced gymnasts do not have this problem when they are doing L-sits, but in order to do handstand pushups the bars have to be high enough to allow for the gymnast's head to go below the bars. From our experience, we have found that their should be around 7 inches from the top of the parallelle rail to the ground. This allows room for both beginners and advanced gymnasts, while not being too high to compromise the stability and safety of the parallelles.

Portability - Portability is an often overlooked quality in a set of parallelles. If the parallelles are too heavy or too bulky, it is not feasible to transport the parallelles easily. It is a tremendous advantage for a gymnast to have access to a set of parallelles when traveling to a competition or sitting in a hotel room. Sometimes when at a competition the gymnast is not able to get into the gym before the big day, but having a set of parallelles handy allows the gymnast to get an adequate workout in prior to the meet.

Stability - The stability of the parallettes is crucial not only for safety reasons, but also for proper technique development. The base of the parallettes needs to be long enough to prevent the parallettes from rocking or tipping over when the gymnast is training. Also, if the gymnast fears the bars are going to move or tip over while performing an exercise, he will tend to compensate the technique of the skill. The length of the parallette base should be constructed in direct proportion to the height of the parallettes. The higher the parallettes are, the longer the base should be to alleviate rocking or tipping over.

Size of Rail - The size of the parallette rail should be as close as possible to the size of the actual parallel bars rail. Especially important for the beginner levels, this serves to enhance familiarity with the parallel bars. Depending on the manufacturer, the size and shape of a parallel bar rail can vary slightly but, we have found a diameter of 1.5 inches to be about average.

Durability - Obviously, the set of parallettes you buy is an investment in your gymnast's career. You want them to last! Throughout our careers we have trained on parallettes made out of every type of material imaginable and had the opportunity to test their durability over the years.

The majority of parallettes on the market today are made with a wood parallette rail. It is important that the wood is hard and consistent. In the testing we performed using several different types of woods, we found some interesting results. Pine, a very popular wood used for parallette rails, was just too soft a wood to stand the force of a bigger gymnast. Oak was an extremely hard wood, but it tended to chip off easily because of the inconsistency of the grain. We found that maple provided the best result for the different woods in overall strength and consistency of grain. The maple is a little more costly, but definitely proves to be worth the money for a long-term investment.

Though maple wood tends to be the most durable, it's weight may be a factor when considering portability. PVC has proven to be extremely durable and lightweight. The PVC provides a slight flex in the bar, comparable to the flex in the actual parallel bars you see when gymnasts are competing. The PVC must be reinforced with a strong adhesive, however, to ensure it's durability.

Where to Buy - When looking for the perfect set of parallettes to buy, be sure to consider all of the above characteristics. It really is a long term investment in your gymnast's career, so you want to make sure you get the most for your money. Don't be fooled by fancy paint jobs or marketing schemes by the manufacturers. Just focus on the essentials mentioned above.

When we researched the marketplace for just the right set of parallettes that had all the qualities mentioned above, we were hard-pressed to find one. So, we went to work. We worked with an engineer to design the exact set of parallettes we were looking for. We came up with two different versions, each designed for a specific purpose:

American Gymnast Travellettes

dimensions:

1.25" diameter bar, 23" long, 8" high, each base is 11 1/4" wide

For the gymnast on the go... the American Gymnast Travellettes are perfect for use at home, in the gym, or to take with you when you travel to your next competition. Our Travellettes **will fit easily in your bag** so you can take your workout with you. We designed the American Gymnast Travellettes exactly the same as our traditional Parallettes, but used a durable, lightweight PVC with a unique interlocking design making assembly a snap.

Never miss another workout!

[>>> visit American-Gymnast.com to purchase](http://American-Gymnast.com)



American Gymnast Parallettes

dimensions:

1.5" diameter bar, 24" long, 7" high, each base is 11" wide

material:

solid maple

An essential training aide to every gymnast's career, the American Gymnast Parallettes were specially designed by gymnasts, for gymnasts. Used by World and Olympic Team Members, these parallettes are perfect for training at home or in the gym.

[>>> visit American-Gymnast.com to purchase](http://American-Gymnast.com)

