

How to Learn a Backflip

Introduction

Have you ever wanted to perform a back flip at a social event to impress a crowd? Or perhaps you are attempting to learn one for a gymnastics class or to make a cheerleading team. Whatever the incentive might be, the process is a long but rewarding one. It may take some time until you are comfortably and safely performing this impressive feat but the challenge is worth the struggle in the end.

In order to accomplish this task a few abilities need to be learned. You need to be able to perform a proper arm swing technique, have a quick and high enough jump and be able to rotate in the air. Each of these three abilities has steps to learning them that will be explained in the following guide. Also, some basic terminology must be understood before the reader can thoroughly comprehend this guide. The terms include a **tuck**, **safety landing**, a **drill**, and **crash mat**. These terms are all included and defined in the glossary at the end of this guide.

A few disclaimers must be mentioned before the task is attempted to be performed. A back flip and related drills can cause serious back and neck related injuries to the person attempting it if the steps are not performed properly and with the proper instruction. The skills should be performed with extreme care and supervision and with the proper equipment present. Soft mats and a coach should be present while trying to learn this skill. A gymnastics gym is a perfect place to practice. With the proper supervision, coaching and effort the skill may be learned in a 1-2 months period depending on the frequency of practice and physical condition of the student.

Materials List

A few materials must be present to obtain the proper environment to learn the skill. A list of these materials can be found below.

- Solid, flat 2 foot tall mat
- Mat or stack of soft mats that is hip level on the learner
- Gym shorts
- T-Shirt
- Foam block pit
- Certified gymnastics coach
- Carpeted spring floor

Back Flip Instructions

Step 1: Stretch

- Change into T-shirt and shorts
- Find an open area on a carpeted spring floor at your gym
- Stretch for 15-20 minutes
- Hold each position for 5-10 seconds

It is important to be limber when attempting a back flip because if you do not stretch it increases your chances of pulling or even tearing a muscle. This guide will not go in depth about what stretches should be performed, but it would be wise to ask your instructor for stretching instructions. The important thing is to stretch your legs, back and arms so you are ready for physical activity. This should be done before every training session for about 15-20 minutes. Positions may include standing up and touching your toes, sitting down and touching your toes and holding your arm straight across your chest with your other arm and pulling. **CAUTION:** Make sure you feel stretched and warmed up before you attempt the following steps.

Step 2: Arm Swing Jumping Drills

Before beginning this step, some set up is required. You or your instructor should position a 2ft tall solid and flat mat on the same carpeted spring floor you stretched on then do the following:

1. Face away from the 2 foot tall mat
2. Position your heels 1-2 inches away from the edge of the mat
3. Swing your arms back behind you while bending your legs
4. Swing them up to your ears while you jump backwards on top of the mat
5. Stop on top of the mat with your arms above your head

The goal is to keep your legs as straight as possible in the air. Also, your head should remain in a neutral position with you looking directly forward. The proper position you should be in before and after you jump is depicted below.



Before (Step 3)



After (Step 5)

Once you are able to jump onto the block with a minimal leg bend and you are accustomed to the arm swing motion, you are ready to proceed to the next step.

Step 3: Jumping onto a Mat Stack

Before performing this step a soft surface must be made at about hip level of the student. This can be made from a mat stack or even a larger soft mat. Then the following must be done:

1. Face away from the mat or mat stack
2. Position your feet 1-2 inches away from the edge of the mat
3. Swing your arms back behind you while bending your legs
4. Swing your arms forward while jumping
5. Grab your shins in the air and form a tuck position
6. Land on your back in a tuck position with your knees apart

What this step accomplishes is for the student to learn how to properly rotate in the air. Also, so the student learns to get into the proper flipping position in the air early enough in the flip. It is important to note that while in the tuck position, the student should have their nose between their knees. The proper positions are depicted below.



Before



After

Failure to do this may result in a broken nose. This step should be performed until the student is landing directly in a tuck position on the crash mat.

Step 4: Flipping into a Foam Pit

This step will involve the foam block pit and an instructor. Ultimately, the student will be flipping into the pit with the assistance of a certified instructor. The following must be done:

1. Find instructor and go over to the foam pit
2. Communicate with your instructor what you are going to do
3. Face away from the foam pit
4. Position your heels 1-2 inches from the edge of the pit
5. Swing your arms back and bend your knees
6. Swing your arms forward while jumping
7. Grab your shins in the air and form a tuck position
8. Rotate to your feet
9. Ready yourself for the landing in the pit

Notice that most of the steps are the exact same as the previous step and the only difference is the landing. This is why the previous drill is so vital. Also notice that the tuck position in the air looks exactly like the one you end in after the last step. The proper positions are depicted below.



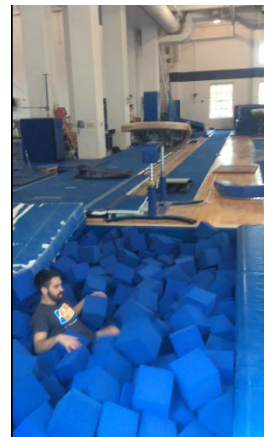
Position 1 (Step 5)



Position 2 (Step 6)



Position 3 (Step 7)



Position 4 (Step 9)

Perform this drill over and over until you are completely comfortable and ready to try it on the spring floor.

Step 5: Performing a Backflip on the Floor with an Instructor

Once the previous step is performed with ease, the student is ready to move onto the floor. Some step up is involved before this step is performed. A thin 2 inch thick crash mat must be placed on the spring floor and an instructor must be present.

1. Face away from the thin crash mat
2. Position heels 1-2 inches from the edge of the mat
3. Swing arms back and bend your knees
4. Swing arms forward and jump
5. Grab shins in the air forming a tuck position
6. Rotate through the air until your feet are under you
7. Straighten your knees slightly
8. Land in a **safety landing** position

This step should be performed until the student is finally comfortable to attempt it on their own. It is important to note that to reach this point it may take the student one to two months so they should not be discouraged if the skill is not learned immediately. After a while the instructor will help you less and less until you are performing a back flip on your own.

Step 6: By yourself

Finally, when all the other steps are performed with each the student is ready to attempt the skill on their own. An instructor may be present but only if something goes wrong. **WARNING:** Even after you have completed the back flip multiple times on your own in the gym, the student should not perform it on their own immediately outside of the gym for risk of injury may be present.

Glossary:

- **Tuck:** a position where both of your knees are by your head and your legs are bent with your hands on your shins and head between your knees
- **Safety landing:** a position where your legs are bent with your back flat and arms straight out in front of you
- **Drill:** a preliminary step performed for the purpose of learning a back flip.
- **Crash mat:** any soft mat that its purpose is to soften your landing when performing a back flip or associated drills.