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CHILDREN'S MUSCULAR STRENGTH & ENDURANCE

Jul 20, 2010 | By DaniellaV

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Teaching strength training to children can serve as a valuable investment in their health and future. Contrary to traditional views, any child who is ready to participate in an organized sport such as baseball, soccer or gymnastics is capable of participating in strength training, as stated by the American College of Sports Medicine. Even non-athletic children who have the emotional maturity to follow instructions can benefit from resistance training. Whichever the case, strength training can play a vital part in fostering the development of lifelong healthy habits in any child's life.

MISCONCEPTIONS

Traditional beliefs have held that youth strength training can cause injury and irreversible damage to bone structures and growth plates. However, it is more likely that such injuries are a result of incorrect instruction, inadequate supervision, or both. In fact, several studies have pointed to the low risk of injury among children who follow age-appropriate training regimens with the proper guidance. According to a study by Wayne L. Westcott, fitness research director at the South Shore YMCA in Quincy, Mass., strength

training can be one of the best ways to enhance musculoskeletal development in youth. Increasing muscular strength can also improve sports performance and overall fitness skills and decrease the incidence of sports-related injuries.

BENEFITS

The benefits produced from strength training cover the physical and psychological. Physical benefits include positive effects on cardiovascular fitness, body composition, bone mineral density and blood lipid profiles. Furthermore, as kids improve their physical fitness they will also begin to feel better about themselves as their self-esteem improves. Other psychological benefits include mental discipline and socialization similar to what team sports can produce, according to a study of prepubescent children aged 12 to 14 done by Avery Faigenbaum, professor of health and exercise science at the College of New Jersey.

CONSIDERATIONS

When a child starts a strength training program, a doctor's approval isn't always necessary but can help in spotting risk factors for injury. Clearly, a child with health problems should always obtain approval from a doctor before beginning training. Although there are no official guidelines indicating the appropriate age for beginning strength training, a child should have reached a general level of postural, balance, agility and other

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sports-specific skills. A child typically does not have such skills until at least 7 or 8 years of age.

GUIDELINES

A typical strength training routine can involve weights, weight machines, elastic resistance bands, or even body weight. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics' Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness, children should perform eight to 15 repetitions with light or no resistance to perfect proper technique and perform each exercise with a full range of motion. Once they can do that, begin to add weight in 10 percent increments. A routine typically should include all muscle groups, including the core. The council recommends doing workouts two or three days a week on nonconsecutive days with a 10- to 15-minute warm-up and cool-down for each session.

Kids also need well-balanced diets that vary by age and gender, according to the Mayo Clinic's nutrition guidelines. Generally, diets rich in fruits and vegetables, carbohydrates, proteins and healthy fats are vital to the maintenance of children's bodies and will ensure their recovery from strength training sessions.

SUPPORT

Almost as important as proper technique, supervision and nutrition is the need to keep strength training routines fresh, fun and engaging for kids so they'll continue to do them. Support and encouragement from parents, teachers and coaches will make the experience more positive and impart in kids the importance of a healthy, fit lifestyle.

REFERENCES

- Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness: Policy statement: Strength training by children and adolescents
- American College of Sports Medicine: Youth strength training
- Journal of Strength and Conditioning: Psychosocial benefits of prepubescent strength training; Faigenbaum; 1995
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