



Children and Weight Training: Supervision is Key

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Parents are often looking for a way to give their kids an advantage at whatever sport they play. Is weight training safe and is there any benefit to weight training for younger individuals? If the children are supervised by trained individuals, the answer is yes. It is possible to achieve strength gains, with minimal risk of injury, if proper weight training programs are used.

With a properly designed strength training program children can improve strength, increase resistance to injury, improve motor fitness performance, increase cardio respiratory fitness, and increase sports performance. More importantly, with the epidemic of childhood obesity in our society, strength training can also improve body composition, increase adherence to physical activity, and stimulate a more positive attitude toward exercise.

If a child is involved in a weight training program, it should only be done 1-2 times per week and should be only one part of their exercise program including cardio respiratory fitness, flexibility, and agility exercise. Whoever is supervising and designing the strength training program should familiarize themselves with the following guidelines suggested by the American College of Sports Medicine in order to ensure safety:

1. Activities should be closely monitored.
2. Remember that children are physiologically immature.
3. The primary focus should be on proper techniques, not on the amount of weight.
4. Gradual application of weight should be added only after proper techniques are demonstrated.
5. Proper breathing techniques should be used.
6. Power lifting and body building should be avoided.
7. Multi-joint exercises should be emphasized.
8. Children need to be able to understand and follow directions.

When designing a program, children should do 1-2 sets of 8-10 different exercises with 1-2 minutes of rest in between sets. Repetitions should be kept above 8. Children should never “max out” and reps should be increased before increasing weight. Once 15 repetitions become too easy, the next weight increment can be attempted. There is no set amount of weight that children should start with and there is no maximum amount that they should lift, as long as they can lift the weight 8 or more times. In other words, if they can't lift it 8 times, it's too heavy. There is also no specific age at which you should begin weight training, however, the child should be able to follow directions and understand the importance of proper technique and supervision.

Overall, with proper supervision and instruction, weight training can be a great way to promote physical activity for youth and it can help them initiate an active lifestyle, which they can take with them into adulthood.

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About the Authors and Midwest Physical Therapy and Sports Center:

Justin Hash, PT: Hash is a 2003 graduate of the Mayo School of Health Sciences, where he received a Master's of Physical Therapy degree. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in Exercise Science in 2001. A native of Lincoln, he graduated from Lincoln East High School. Justin is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist and enjoys working with a variety of patients with a special interest in sports injuries. Hash joined the Midwest Physical Therapy and Sports Center staff in 2003.

Nellie Van Ranken, PTA: Nellie is a 1998 graduate of Colby Community College in Colby, Kansas where she received her Associate's of Applied Science degree as a Physical Therapist Assistant. She has experience in inpatient, outpatient, geriatrics, aquatic and women's health. Nellie's special interests professionally include general orthopedics, massage and myofascial release. Her continuing education includes myofascial release as well as shoulder rehabilitation. She has been employed at Midwest Physical Therapy since 2001.

About Midwest Physical Therapy and Sports Center: Established in 1996, Midwest Physical Therapy and Sports Center has grown from a single clinic to three locations in the Lincoln area with eight physical therapists and two physical therapist assistants.

Owner Renee Tewes opened the clinic to provide the highest quality rehabilitation care to physical therapy patients. Midwest Physical Therapy and Sports Center is the official physical therapy center serving the Lincoln Stars and Lincoln Saltdogs. For more information, please call: 436-2535 or go to www.midwestphysicaltherapy.com

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