



Strength Training for Kids

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Is strength training ok for kids?

This is a common question for most parents with young athletes.

The answer: Yes, if done right.

Strength training should not be confused with power lifting, bodybuilding, or weightlifting. Lifting too much weight too soon can have a negative impact on developing bones and muscles in children with open growth plates. In other words, children whose bones are not yet fully developed are at great risk when they lift too much weight and do so in the wrong way. However, children can start strength training if done properly.

Proper technique and safety are the most important components of a strength training or performance enhancement program for kids. Light resistance and controlled movements with proper feedback allow kids to learn proper movement patterns. This helps with body awareness, control, and balance that create a foundation for future performance in any sport or activity.

The benefit of proper strength training includes:

- Development of optimal movement patterns
- Increased muscle strength and endurance
- Protection of muscle and joints from injury
- Improvement in performance in any sport
- Increased self-esteem
- Increased metabolism, healthy blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- Helps in maintaining a healthy weight and prevents diabetes

At what age can my child start a strength training program?

It is always a good idea to have a discussion with your child's doctor about starting a strength training program. Kids who are mature enough - able to follow instruction and receive feedback - to practice proper technique can start a strength program, as early as age 8.

What does a strength training program look like for kids? How do I start?

The best way to start is to seek out someone who has experience in youth strength training and allow them to create a safe program for your child. Another option is to enroll your child in a supervised class or program that specializes in youth development. OSI Physical Therapy offers programs for youth development and sports performance training that can help your child develop as an athlete.

Strength training programs for kids should have light resistance exercises. Most programs will include body weight exercises like push-ups and wall squats. The most important component of structured strength training includes supervision and a focus on proper technique. Proper rest is important and a strength training program should have the frequency of 2 to 3 times per week.

For questions regarding youth strength training programs or more information with OSI youth programs, please contact the author, Chandra Shirley, at cshirley@therapypartners.com.

Reference:

Strength Training: OK for Kids? *Tween and teen health*. Mayo Clinic staff. www.mayoclinic.com