

# Give your Children the Gift of Exercise

*“A Safe, Effective, Strength Training for Children”*

By Rick Sullivan

It had long been believed that children (both pre-pubescent and adolescent) should stay away from any type of resistance exercise program, however, this myth has proven to be untrue. Such fears existed for quite some time despite the weak foundation upon which they stood. Fortunately researchers from prominent medical and health organizations (the American Orthopedic Society for Sports Medicine, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Sports Medicine, etc.) are discovering that just the opposite seems to be true. A properly designed, well-supervised strength training program could have invaluable benefits for children.

The long standing belief that such a program would cause irreparable damage to a child's immature musculo-skeletal system, particularly the growth cartilage such as the sensitive epiphyseal (growth) plates, has been shown to be misleading. Another erroneous contention had been that strength training would provide no appreciable benefits for our children. Not only has the current research in the area of pediatric exercise science shown that strength training can be very safe for our youth but such an endeavor will pay significant dividends. Children engaged in strength training programs have experienced such benefits as improved muscular strength and endurance, increased connective tissue strength (which will reduce the risk of injury),

enhanced motor coordination, and elevated self esteem.

While the positive aspects of weight training for children are numerous, as with any athletic activity there are certain risks that need to be addressed. All programs should be supervised by a competent fitness professional and the child participating should be mature enough to accept and follow directions. Mastering exercise technique, motor learning, and creating safe, healthy exercise habits should be the foundation of any pediatric or adolescent strength training program.

The American College of Sports Medicine offers the following guidelines and principles as suggestions for those interested in developing a sound strength training program for children:

1. No matter how big, strong or mature the child may appear, remember that he/she is physiologically immature.
2. Teach proper training techniques for all of the exercise movements involved in the program and proper breathing techniques (i.e. no breath holding).
3. Stress that each exercise should be performed in a manner in which speed is slow and controlled, avoiding ballistic (fast and jerky) movements.
4. Under no circumstances should a weight be used that

allows for the performance of less than eight repetitions per set. Heavier weights may increase the likelihood of exercise form discrepancies, which could be potentially damaging to the developing skeletal and joint structures. It is not recommended that any exercise be taken to the point of momentary muscular failure.

5. As a training effect occurs, achieve an overload initially by initially increasing the number of repetitions, and then by increasing the absolute resistance (just remember the weight should allow for the performance of at least 8 *controlled* repetitions).
6. Perform one to two sets of eight to ten exercises (with 8-12 repetitions per set), ensuring that all of the major muscle groups are included.
7. Limit strength training sessions to twice per week and encourage children and adolescents to seek other forms of physical activity.
8. Pediatric/Adolescent exercises routines should

emphasize full range, multi-joint exercises (as opposed to single-joint exercises).

9. Do not overload the skeletal and joint structures with maximal weights
10. Finally and perhaps most important, all strength-training activities should be closely supervised and monitored by an appropriately trained individual.

Don't deny your children the many benefits of strength training because of the mistaken notion that it is unproductive and dangerous. Studies have shown that such a program can have a very positive effect on the developmental process (some children have actually doubled the normal rate of maturation.). Follow the above recommendations (with particular attention placed on quality supervision and instruction) and your children will have a rewarding weight training experience.

**EVOLVE EXERCISE**

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