

FitFacts®



Children and Running

IF YOUR CHILDREN HAVE EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN RUNNING, DON'T DISCOURAGE THEM! RUNNING IS A GREAT NATURAL SPORT THAT REQUIRES VERY LITTLE EQUIPMENT. THEY SHOULD DETERMINE THEIR OWN PACE AND RUN ONLY IF IT'S FUN AND ENJOYABLE.

A FEW PRECAUTIONS BEFORE GETTING STARTED

- Check with a physician to rule out any physical limitations that may prevent your child from participating in a running program.
- Invest in a high-quality shoe that is made for running, with proper cushioning in the forefoot and heel, as well as arch support. Replace running shoes as soon as they show signs of breakdown, which, depending on how much your child runs, could occur after about three months.
- Kids are more sensitive to heat, so it is essential that they drink plenty of water and avoid running in the heat of the day.
- Show them how to stretch their calves, hip flexors and hamstrings after cooling down at the end of each run.

FINDING THEIR FORM

Since running is a natural action, most children will develop their own form. Encourage your child to relax while running - a scrunched face and clenched fists indicate tension, which usually means the intensity is too high and the child is straining rather than having fun.

Like adults, kids should be able to carry on a conversation while running and should be able to smile. Urge them to slow down if necessary and keep their shoulders relaxed while steadily and smoothly swinging their arms.

HOW FAR SHOULD THEY GO?

Children should run only as far as they are comfortable. Children will gauge their own limitations, so always listen when they say it's time to stop. Kids should not begin running races above 5 kilometers (3.1 miles) until they are at least of high school age. Most marathons will not allow athletes under the age of 18 to enter due to possible skeletal injuries.

SET ATTAINABLE GOALS

For children, the goal of running is to stay in shape and have fun! Instead of focusing on winning races, help improve your children's self-esteem by praising their efforts and helping them reach their goals. Chances are that if they enjoy running and feel a sense of pride when they are finished, they will remain active for life.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[American Council on Exercise](#)

[Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

[Runners World](#)