

FitFacts®

Strength Training for Kids: A Guide for Parents and Teachers

ALTHOUGH PARENTS AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS HAVE TRADITIONALLY SHIED AWAY FROM STRENGTH TRAINING WITH THEIR CHILDREN OR STUDENTS, RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT IT IS A SUITABLE—AND SAFE—OPTION FOR MOST KIDS.



CORRECTING THE MISCONCEPTIONS

Two common misconceptions about youth strength training are that it may stunt the growth of children and that children should not lift weights until they are 12 years old. There is no evidence to support either of these statements. In fact, all of the major fitness and medical organizations in the U.S. recommend [strength training for youth](#), assuming that basic guidelines are adhered to and that appropriate leadership is present. Children can actually begin to train with weights as soon as they are able to accept and follow directions—usually around the age of seven or eight.

THE BENEFITS

Benefits of strength training include improvements in muscular fitness, bone mineral density, body composition, motor fitness performance and injury resistance, and enhanced sports performance. The most important benefit of any youth fitness program is an improved attitude about lifelong activity. Abstract ideas like healthy bones and disease prevention will do little to motivate kids, so focus on benefits like self-improvement, individual success, and fun. Fun is the top motivator in almost every aspect of a child's life.

Additionally, children who strength train often have improved self-esteem, mental discipline and socialization. Weight training also provides an opportunity to let children, particularly overweight and [obese children](#) who often struggle with group P.E. activities, stand out and perform well.

HOW TO GET YOUR KIDS STARTED

The initial focus should be developing good form and learning the basics of strength training. Start slowly and lean toward underestimating the strength of young exercisers. Not only is it safer to do so, but it also leaves plenty of room for progress—and tangible progress is essential in the early stages of a youth strength-training program.

Introduce children to a variety of exercises and types of resistance, like medicine balls and resistance tubing in addition to the more traditional free weights and machines. Be sure that all the major muscle groups are addressed in a balanced, full-body workout.

Your goals when exercising with children are simple: be safe, have fun and help kids learn to love physical activity.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

American Council on Exercise—[Youth Strength Training by Avery D. Faigenbaum & Wayne L. Westcott](#)
[About.com](#)