

Little things

that matter

Okay for Kids to Pump It Up!

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One question we will occasionally get from parents is whether it is okay for their child to start lifting weights. Up until the 1980's, a child's lifting weights before he/she was finished growing was considered by health experts to be unhelpful and even unsafe. The 1983 statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics suggested a high rate of injury with weightlifting and stated it should be avoided by preadolescents. Over the past 20 years, better studies began to emerge showing benefits for kids. The key study was probably in 1996, when Faigenbaum et al. studied 7-12 year old boys and girls undergoing resistive weight training. As a group they showed large and significant increases in strength. What they didn't get is an increase in muscle size which comes during and after puberty when the blood levels of androgen hormones like testosterone increase. Since males secrete up to 100 times more testosterone than females, they tend to get the bigger muscles. The following are some other benefits that have been shown for children 7 and older:

- improved muscle endurance
- cardiorespiratory fitness
- improved body composition
- enhanced sports performance
- enhanced mental health
- increased bone mineral density
- improved blood lipid profile
- improved motor skills
- increased resistance to injury
- stimulated attitude towards lifelong physical activity

Here are some key points:

1. Supervision - Most weight-lifting related injuries are due to poor supervision. The emphasis should be on proper safety and technique.
2. Moderate weights are better than heavy - The recommendation is 8-12 repetitions, 1-3 sets of each exercise, 2-3 times per week. "Power lifting" (lower reps, higher weight) should not be done until growth is complete and under the guidance of a certified trainer or experienced parent.
3. Flexibility - Thorough stretching allows those stronger muscles to fire to their potential.

Have fun! Be safe!

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Flu Vaccines

Remember to sign up for flu vaccines. Flu vaccines are scheduled for October and November. These patients are at high risk for complications from the flu: children from six months to two years of age and children with asthma, diabetes, organ transplant, or any chronic illness. If your child has ever had any flu vaccine, they require only one per flu season. For children less than nine years of age who have never received a flu vaccine, two flu vaccines are recommended to be given at least one month apart. We can only provide flu vaccines for patients of Pediatric Associates. We cannot provide flu vaccines for parents nor for non-patients of Pediatric Associates. Currently, we are not aware of any shortage of flu vaccines. However, if there were to be a shortage, flu vaccines will be distributed based on risk factors.

Eating Right and Staying Healthy

With the ever-increasing concerns over obesity in the United States, more and more emphasis should be placed on healthy eating habits and physical activity for our children (as well as for us parents). Consuming too many calories and exercising too little can lead to being overweight with subsequent health problems including diabetes, sleep apnea, high blood pressure, and depression — to name only a few. The entire family can play a role in helping a child learn healthy habits that can last a lifetime.

If the entire family develops healthy eating habits and an active lifestyle, the whole family benefits, and in doing so, does not single out the child who may be overweight. Emphasize to your child that he/she is loved no matter what and although weight issues are the concern, accept your child at any weight. Listen to your child's concerns about weight and show support, understanding, and encouragement.

As for healthy eating habits, encourage more servings of fruits and vegetables and allow your child to help select these at the grocery store. Encourage breakfast every day and plan nutritious, healthy meals to eat together as a family. Decrease the intake of soft drinks as well as high-calorie foods including chips, cookies, and candy. Buy less of these so they are not available in the home. Of course, these snacks are okay every once in awhile, but try to keep healthy snacks more available (e.g., fresh fruit, canned fruit in light syrup, fresh vegetables, reduced-fat cheese, whole wheat crackers, baked chips, animal crackers, low-fat vanilla wafers, low-fat or air-popped popcorn). Have low-fat milk or water available instead of fruit juice or soft drinks. These suggestions may not go over well at first with kids who are used to the high-calorie snacks, but continue to offer the healthy foods and allow your kids to help choose which healthy foods they would like to try.

Also be careful with excess carbohydrates, particularly breads and pastas. (These foods may not seem to be in the same category as the chips and cookies; however, white breads and pastas are, for the most part, refined sugar and can be a not-so-obvious cause of excessive weight gain.) Try to limit these foods at mealtime as well and if possible, try to switch to whole wheat breads and pastas.



Yearly Well Visits:

Yearly check-ups are an important part of your children's health and well-being. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends yearly well visits to follow growth parameters and development as well as to screen for early prevention/detection of any abnormalities. In addition, your child may be required to have physical examination forms before entering Kindergarten, 6th grade, 9th grade and/or for sports participation. The majority of insurance companies provide well child coverage, including insurance plans with high deductibles, such as HRA, HSA health plans. We do recommend, however, that you always double-check with your insurance to verify coverage.

Exercise - The Other Key Ingredient

Here are some suggestions for helping your child get exercise:

- Set a good example. If a child sees his/her parents being active and having fun, he/she will be much more likely to join in and stay active. Activities which can be done together as a family can include washing the car, going to the park or zoo, or playing on the swing set. Other activities for your child include riding a bike, walking the dog, climbing on a jungle gym, jumping rope, shooting baskets, or playing hopscotch.
- Be Encouraging. Encourage your child to try a sport or class, particularly selecting activities that raise the heart rate (e.g., soccer, swimming, basketball). Have a list of activities that your child can choose from, but make sure he/she chooses one. Be sensitive, however, to your child. Help him/her choose activities in which he/she will not be embarrassed to participate.
- Be Consistent. Children should get some physical activity every day, even if it is not all at one time. (The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends 60 minutes of activity for children every day.) Try to get some sort of exercise daily. If this is not possible, try to aim for at least 15-20 minutes of cardiovascular activity 3-4 times a week.
- Limit Inactivity. Set limits on television and video games. Try to find other activities besides watching TV (e.g., play charades or active games like Twister).

Besides helping control weight gain, physical activity can help build lean muscle, strengthen bones, increase flexibility and balance, improve self-esteem and mood, and decrease the risk of chronic disease.

Resources for More Information

- the Food Guide Pyramid (This can help make healthy food choices.)
www.usda.gov/cnpp/pyrabklt.pdf
- tips for using the Food Guide Pyramid for young children 2 to 6 years old
www.usda.gov/cnpp/KidsPyra/Pyr.Book.pdf
- healthy eating and physical activity across your lifespan: helping your child
www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/pubs/parentips/tipsforparents.htm



Office Notes

Vaccine for Children (VFC) Program

This program (provided by the state of Kentucky) provides immunizations, at a reduced cost, for Kentucky children (under 18 years of age) who have no well-child coverage. The cost per vaccine is \$10. Children who are covered under a plan with well-child coverage and a high deductible are not eligible.

ADD/ADHD medications

Parents may want to inquire with their insurance companies if mail order options are available for ADD/ADHD stimulant medications. If this is available, it would alleviate the need for picking up a prescription every month and may be a less expensive alternative.



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