



Fitness and Your 6-12 Year Old

Fitness that begins in childhood is a lifelong investment. The regular habit of exercise is important to develop during this stage to prevent obesity. Kids should learn to develop exercise as a lifelong habit. Studies have shown that children who participate in fitness activities continue to stay active throughout their lives. In addition, regular physical activity helps your child to play and meet challenges, and it's perfect for children of all ages.

Part of committing your child to fitness is limiting your own excessive computer or television time, as well as becoming a role model by getting regular exercise on your own or with your children. Moms or dads can show children the importance of sports activities by playing along, coaching teams, or simply coming out to support their child's games. Remember that you are your child's best role model, so always pay attention to safety in sports and recreation.

Physical Fitness and Chronic Health Conditions

Children with chronic health conditions and disabilities should not be excluded from fitness activities; they receive the same positive benefits from exercise. Some activities may need to be modified or adapted to your child's disability. Certain activities are dangerous for some health conditions. Consult your child's doctor about the safety of fitness activities for your child with a disability.

What exercises can kids in this age group do to stay fit?

As children develop, so do their abilities to participate in a variety of sporting activities. Elementary-school-aged children, particularly those between the ages of 10 and 12, are poised for new learning experiences and have the ability to absorb new skills required for both team and individual sports quickly.

Even children who prefer not to participate in organized teams need regular exercise. Any number of noncompetitive sports, such as swimming, ice-skating, gymnastics, dance and nonviolent martial arts, can help keep your child healthy and fit. At age 11, children who are interested may begin to lift light weights (under supervision) to build muscle to help prevent future sports injuries.

What should parents do if they're concerned about their child's fitness?

If your child refuses to participate in any fitness activity, it can be an indication of a physical or psychological problem. Children who complain of pain when they play or consistently refuse to

join other children in outdoor play may need to be seen by a doctor. Even a shy child needs to play with other kids.

Once children begin to participate in sports, injuries may occur. Many of these arise from the overuse of certain muscles, or because children's skeletal and muscular systems are not yet fully developed. These growing muscles, ligaments and tendons are vulnerable to injury. During puberty, which can begin as early as 8 1/2 years in girls and 9 years in boys, children experience a growth spurt, when bones grow more quickly than muscles and tendons, making muscles and tendons short, tight and easily injured.

In addition, preteens going through puberty may also become less coordinated as they adjust to their physical changes, which can increase the risk of injury. Although many injuries will respond to RICE (Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation) if your child seems to be in severe pain or the injury doesn't seem to be getting any better, you should see your child's doctor. Appropriate warm-ups and stretching will decrease the chance of muscle and tendon injury.

Young athletes, particularly those in gymnastics, wrestling or dance, may develop eating disorders. If your son or daughter refuses to eat certain food groups (such as fats), becomes overly concerned with their body image, or experiences a sudden loss or gain in weight, you should talk to your child about your concerns. If your child doesn't respond to your discussion, consult your child's doctor. Early intervention is vital.

Family Fitness Tips

Any number of activities can be incorporated into a family fitness activity. Walking, bike riding, camping and hiking provide opportunities for fitness and fun. Tennis, skiing, dancing and ice-skating offer children a chance to build skills in sports that can bring them pleasure for a lifetime.

Whether children are participating in sports or individual fitness activities, safety should be paramount. When engaging in family fitness outings, keep these tips in mind:

- Parents should be sure that kids always wear safety helmets when on wheeled vehicles.
- Young athletes should be taught the importance of stretching their growing muscles before any strenuous physical activity to prevent tears and strains.
- Your child's coach or trainer should be familiar with how to deal with injuries such as concussions. Children who have had even a mild concussion and who did not lose consciousness may only be confused, but may still be at risk of serious injury if they have another concussion before complete recovery.
- Always apply sunscreen when playing outdoors, even on overcast days.
- One common activity that is not recommended is the use of trampolines. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all trampolines, including home trampolines, be avoided due to the high number of injuries at all ages.