

Exercise and Children

by Julia C. Karlstad, MEd, CSCS

Appropriate exercises, general exercises and how parents can get involved

Obesity in Children

Obesity is on the rise not only among adults, but also among children. Some experts believe that if the rise in the obesity trend continues, the increase in life expectancy that has occurred around the world throughout the past century may come to a screeching halt. In fact, some speculate that kids may not outlive their parents.

In an effort to reverse this trend in childhood obesity, it is important for kids to be physically active and start practicing healthy habits when they are

young. If they don't, they may become one of the following alarming statistics:

- Throughout a 15-year period, childhood obesity increased more than 50 percent [1], and lack of exercise accounted for more than 50 percent of the cases of childhood obesity [2].
- Children who are not physically fit tend to have increased blood pressure and cholesterol, be more prone to type 2 diabetes and acquire other chronic diseases [2].

Should Children Perform the Same Exercises as Adults?

General exercise guidelines for children to follow are:

- Children, especially young children, should be involved in fun or game-like activities. Formal exercise is okay for adolescents, but younger children need more entertainment:
 - Tag, jump rope, hide-and-seek, relays, sports, obstacle courses, etc., are all excellent exercise options for children.
 - Watching television while doing different physical activities, group exercise

or different games may be helpful tactics to encourage young children to enjoy physical activity.

- Strength training can be very valuable for increased performance in sports, preventing injuries and increasing the density of a child's bones; however, keep the following considerations in mind before starting a child in a strength training program:
 - Generally speaking, if a child is old enough to be involved and participate in organized sports, he or she



is old enough to participate in strength training and disciplined enough to follow directions and execute the proper lifting form involved in strength training. In addition, such a child is usually able to control the movements of his/her body more easily.

- o A child should keep the lifting weight relatively light (i.e., approximately 65 percent of a child's one-rep maximum; this would equal about 65 percent of the total weight a child could lift one time for a particular exercise).

A child should try to do at least 20-40 minutes of exercise each day. For weight-loss, the child must gradually increase the duration of each exercise session, working up to 60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week. To achieve this goal, intermittent rounds of physical activity may be more realistic for some children.

About the Author:

Julia Karlstad, MEd, CSCS, is the president of JKFITNESS, LLC. Julia has worked in the fitness industry and specifically the medical wellness community for several years. Previously, Julia developed and directed an exercise physiology program for two bariatric hospitals and three medically supervised weight-loss clinics. She currently serves on the OAC Advisory Board. For more information on Julia, please visit www.juliakarlstad.com or www.jk-fit.com.

References:

[1] Westcott, Wayne L. Youth and strength training: why and how? Available at: www.fitnessandkids.com; accessed August 14, 2007.

Parents should be involved in the following ways:

1. They should be good role models; children tend to follow in their parents' footsteps
2. They should support and encourage their kids to practice healthy habits, including regular exercise and healthy eating habits
3. They should actively teach their children healthy eating habits
4. They shouldn't prohibit their kids from eating unhealthy foods, but simply allow these foods only in moderation
5. They should limit or reduce the amount of time their children are allowed to watch television, play on the computer and play video games
6. If possible, they should encourage physical activity by making it a "family affair"

[2] Westcott, Wayne L. Will your kids be fit or fat? Available at: www.fitnessandkids.com; accessed August 14, 2007.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



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