

## **Strength training and your child**

According to the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA), strength training can be a fun way for kids to build healthy muscles, joints, and bones. With a properly designed and supervised program, they can improve endurance, total fitness level, and sports performance. Strength training can even help prevent injuries and speed up recovery.

### **About Strength Training**

Strength training is the practice of using free weights, weight machines, and rubber resistance bands, or body weight to build muscles. With resistance the muscles have to work harder to move. When the muscles work harder, they grow stronger and more efficient.

Strength training can also help fortify the ligaments and tendons that support the muscles and bones and improve bone density, which is the amount of calcium and minerals in the bone. And the benefits may go beyond physical health. Young athletes may feel better about themselves as they get stronger.

The goal of strength training is not to bulk up. It should not be confused with weight lifting, bodybuilding, and powerlifting, which are not recommended for kids and teens. In these sports, people train with very heavy weights and participate in modeling and lifting competitions. Kids and teens who do those sports can risk injuring their growing bones, muscles, and joints.

### **Age Guidelines**

Generally, if your child is ready to participate in organized sports or activities such as baseball, soccer, gymnastics, or dancing it is usually safe to start strength training.

A child's strength-training program shouldn't just be a scaled-down version of an adult's weight training regimen. A trainer who has experience in working with kids should design a program for your child and show your child the proper techniques, safety precautions, and how to properly use the equipment.

Kids as young as 7 or 8 years old can usually do strength-training activities (such as pushups and sit-ups) as long as they show some interest, can perform the exercises safely, and follow instructions. These exercises can help kids build a sense of balance, control, and awareness of their bodies.

Specific exercises should be learned without resistance. When proper technique is mastered, small amounts of resistance (body weight, band, or weight) can be added. In general as kids get older and stronger, they can gradually increase the amount of resistance they use. A trained professional can help your child determine what the appropriate weight may be.