

Weight Training for Adolescent Girls: Is It Safe?



An important part of strength training, weight lifting provides many health benefits, along with increased strength and endurance in athletics. Because girls produce much less testosterone than boys during puberty, your daughter's muscles will enlarge a little, but most of her increased strength will come from training more nerve cells to fire when a muscle contracts, thus making the contractions more efficient.

The age when children can safely begin a weight-training regimen has been controversial, but such exercises can be safe and effective if proper training techniques and safety precautions are followed. Parents should also consider the child's stage of physical development. Because skeletally immature bodies cannot handle the stress of strength-training exercises, younger children may experience more frequent injuries to the wrist and spine.

Any good strength-training program for adolescents should

- **require a medical exam before training starts;**
- **be supervised by a qualified professional** since most accidents happen when using home equipment or in an unsupervised setting;
- **teach proper lifting techniques using low resistance and require that they be mastered before allowing significant weight to be added;**
- **emphasize a total workout of core and extremity muscle exercises;**
- **avoid explosive and rapid lifting exercises;** and
- **include a 10- to 15-minute warm-up and cool-down component.**

Furthermore, the American Academy of Pediatrics specifically recommends that young people avoid competitive weight lifting, power lifting and bodybuilding until they have reached their full adult height and skeletal maturity.

Before your daughter begins a weight-training program, we can instruct her in the proper form and technique. Such "basic training" will help prevent injuries, encourage safe and appropriate athletic development, and produce a better performing athlete in the long run.