

Strength Training for Kids, Pre-Teens & Adolescents Pt 1

Myth vs. Modern Day Science & Common Sense...

For more than a quarter century, strength and resistance training for kids, pre-teens and adolescents has been predicated on a myth based on an abstract theory conjured up in the mid sixties.

The myth went something like this: Strength and resistance training damages the growth plates of kids and pre teens which can stunt growth. The myth is bunk and science proves it. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics doesn't even establish a minimum age for strength and resistance training; just guidelines on safety, proper technique and supervision.

Old myths die hard so, for the skeptics, we've made the American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement for strength training by children and adolescents available here.

[Download – American Academy of Pediatrics – Strength Training by Children](#)

According to the AAP statement, strength training by kids and pre-teens stimulates more muscle fibers to fire during each muscle contraction. The recruitment of these additional muscles accounts for the increased strength gains.

Some of the other benefits include increased muscle mass (for kids with adequate hormone levels), improved balance, stability and motor skills, increased aerobic/anaerobic capacity, lowered body fat content through increased metabolism and possibly assisting in sports related injury prevention.

Now before you start loading up the weight bar, we have to take a step back and look at some do's, don'ts and realistic expectations.

First, don't confuse strength training with bodybuilding. Bodybuilding's weight training protocols are designed to micro target individual muscle groups and increase muscle mass.

For functional strength training, you want to recruit large muscle groups. What good is developing only upper body or arm strength and putting those gains on a weak base of support? True strength training recruits large muscle groups, not micro target ing small muscle groups. Second, until they reach puberty, kids and pre-teens just don't have the hormones available to make sizeable gains in muscle mass.

Before beginning a strength training program for youngsters, we need to remember that safe strength training is progressive. The most important factors, regardless of age are proper supervision, a safe base of physical fitness and motor skills.

In the "do" department, if we start off progressively, then mastery of body weight exercises should be the first phase of any strength training protocol for kids. I still see high school athletes that can't do a properly formed push-up.

If the young athlete doesn't have the strength or motor skills to correctly perform simple body weight exercises, then they are not ready to advance to loaded exercises using weights or resistance bands. Here's the progression:

Body weight exercises

Weight machines (limit use to learning proper form)

Resistance bands

Free weights

Unlike machines, body weight exercises also recruit your stabilization muscles, joints and ligaments, and help develop your balance and proprioception skills. This is important because balance, stabilization and proprioception are learned skills. Remember, we had to learn how to walk before we could run.

Get into the habit of warming up with stretching, a short jog, jumping rope or jumping jacks before each workout session. Here's a suggested beginner workout using body weight exercises.

Beginner body weight exercises:

Push-ups

Chin-ups/Pull-ups (palms facing you only)

Squats

Squat Thrusts

Lunges

Dips

Crunches

For Grip Strength:

Hang on Chin-up bar

Rope Climbing

Advanced Body Weight Exercises:

Hand Stand Push-up

One-Legged Squat

Japanese Push-ups

One-Arm Push-ups

Janda Sit-ups

One-Arm Chin-ups/Pull-ups (palms facing you only)

Burpees (squat thrust with a jump)

Neck Bridge

For Grip Strength:

Rope Climbing (arms only)

Wring the water out of a wet towel

Wrist Rolls (use a thick dowel attached to a weighted loop of rope) Example:



Now you know that strength training for kids is not only a safe, but effective way to increase physical strength, it also plays a role in overall fitness and possibly injury prevention.

In Part 2 of this article, we will progress to more advanced levels of strength training for kids using free weights and resistance bands.

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