



Moore Health Physiotherapy Explains: Kids in Sport

Statistics concerning children's involvement in physical activity have not been positive in recent times. On the whole, children seem to be getting fatter, aerobic fitness is declining and physical activity is decreasing. Yet, almost in contradiction of these findings, sport has been consistently ranked in the top three preferred leisure-time activities for young Australian boys and girls over the last 50 years (Australian Sports Commission).

Early Start — Lifelong Benefit

Physically active children are more likely to mature into physically active adults. Early and active involvement in sports can provide children and youths with lifelong physical, social and developmental benefits. Athletic participation provides children with lots of personal rewards, including:

- Sense of fun, enjoyment and accomplishment
- Expanded friendship network
- Reduced risk of obesity
- Increased cardiovascular fitness
- Social, mental and personal skill development (eg improved co-operation, concentration, self-discipline, confidence, acceptance of responsibility, sportsmanship and leadership skills)
- Healthy growth of bones, muscles, ligaments and tendons
- Improved coordination, strength, flexibility, motor skills and balance
- Greater ability to physically relax, assisting with achieving better sleep and avoidance of the complications of chronic muscular tension (such as headache or backache)

Injury Prevention and Safety in Sport

All sports should provide safe and enjoyable experiences for children. Here are just a few important tips for keeping active kids safe and injury-free in their sporting environment:

- **Warm Up and Cool Down** — Five to ten minute warm-ups and gentle stretching before and after activities are important safeguards against muscle and tendon injuries.
- **Protective Equipment** — Mouth guards, shin pads, head gear, etc are all there to prevent injury and should never be considered an 'optional extra'. Likewise, using footwear appropriate to the sport being played can also greatly reduce the risk of injury.
- **Temperature Control** — Children are not able to control their body temperature as well as adults. In hot weather conditions, children should be clothed in lightweight and loose fitting clothing. A hat and regularly applied sunscreen are also essential! Conversely, in cool conditions (such as a swimming pool) children may experience a rapid loss of body heat, so regular monitoring may be necessary.
- **Hydration** — Encourage your child to drink lots of water before, during and after any physical activity to avoid dehydration and to assist in recovery.

Encouraging Physical Activity

Whilst leading by example will always be one of the best strategies for encouraging children to be more active, you don't have to be a sporting superstar in order to be a positive role model. Consider the following simple strategies:

- Plan family outings that offer opportunities for physical activity, such as hiking or going for a swim.
- Encourage your child to walk or ride their bicycle for short trips, rather than driving them in the family car.
- Show interest in your child's efforts in sport. You don't always have to understand the ins and outs of the game — just cheering them from the sideline will often be enough to show your interest and support.
- School holiday sporting and activity camps offer excellent opportunities to increase physical activity levels, decrease boredom and expand your child's social networks.
- Set firm time limits on sedentary activities like playing computer games and watching television.
- Employ a range of physical activities as 'rewards' (e.g. 'As soon as you finish your homework we'll go and play catch').