

Strength Training For Teens: Safety First!

Lift Your Exercise Program with Weights

By: Adrienne Loggins

Strength training is a great way for teens to get in shape, whether it's using free weights, weight machines, resistance bands, or just your own body to build strength and muscles. The keys to strength training for teenagers are taking the programs one step at a time and training under supervision.

Dr. Teri McCambridge, Chairperson Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), says that strength training, also known as resistance training, is defined as using a resistance method that applies your own ability to apply force, such as picking up hand weights or doing push-ups.

Strength training can improve athletic performance and also prevent injuries from overuse. It also benefits cardiovascular fitness, can reduce body fat, and increase bone density. Resistance training is also a great way to increase the metabolic rate since it builds more muscles, which use more calories.

There are some risks if teens are not careful about exercising properly, though.

Muscle strains account for 40-70 percent of all strength-training related injuries, including hand, lower and upper back damage. Most of these injuries happen on home equipment with dangerous behavior and unsupervised situations.

Powerlifting, competitive weightlifting, and bodybuilding are not recommended for teens, who are still maturing, because these types of activity can cause serious injuries to growing bones, muscles, and joints. As long as strength training is performed properly with proper supervision it doesn't have to be harmful. Weight training using improper form or weight, on the other hand, has resulted in growth plate injuries and spinal injuries.

Dr. Tony Caterisano, a health and exercise science professor at Furman University, said that it's important that teens should talk to a health professional before starting any weight training program. "Most teens are still in a state of development in terms of skeletal growth and an improper weight training program can lead to injuries that could affect this development," said Caterisano.

So what are the safe and healthy ways to strength train?

- Remember that strength training is only a small part of an overall fitness or sports program.”
- Don't turn to steroids to get big and strong. They are harmful and dangerous.
- Use free weights when starting out. They are easier and smaller to manage while requiring better balance control, making it less likely to get injured from training.
- Start out with less resistance at first, in order to get used to a training program, which means starting out with lighter weights. As you build up strength, you can add repetitions to continue the resistance training.

It's great to want to be in shape, but be safe about it. Ask a professional before loading weights onto the machines. Don't risk permanent injuries in order to look good.

This article has been reviewed by BodiMojo expert, Tara Cousineau, Ph.D.