Too young to weight lift? [1]

Alice,

I have a thirteen-year-old son who wants to start lifting weights. Is he too young?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It's great that your son wants to lift something besides the remote. Indeed, there are questions to ask before he begins to pump iron. What are his motivations for lifting weights? Does he want to become stronger for a particular sport? Is he unhappy with his appearance? Are all of his friends doing it? The purpose for asking these questions needs not be so that you can give a yea or nay to your son's interest. Instead, his answers might clue you into problems, if any exist.

*Resistance training, strength training, and weight training* all relate to the use of free weights and/or weight machines to increase muscular strength and muscular endurance. *Weight and power lifting* involve the use of free weights (usually heavier than those used in weight training). Some of the major lifts engaged in during weight and power lifting can cause injury, especially if the athlete is not physically mature enough to handle the movement and/or weight. Proper technique is also very important for injury prevention and for maximum results? no matter what the age of the lifter is.

The [American Academy of Pediatrics][2] recommends that:

- Children be well supervised by qualified adults.
- Any weight-training program be appropriate to the child's stage of maturation and assessed objectively by medical personnel. (Proper bone development is one of the key factors to assess.)
- Children avoid weight lifting, power lifting, bodybuilding, and the use of maximal amounts of weight until they have met certain developmental criteria.

Here's another question: Where is your son planning to lift? Supervision by a coach or athletic trainer with an academic degree in exercise physiology or a closely related field can make the activity a lot safer and much more effective. Experience working with preteens and teens, and certification from a nationally recognized organization, such as the [National Strength and Conditioning Association][3], wouldn't hurt either. Now that physical education in many schools has finally shifted to accommodate students' total health and interests, weight-training programs are more widely available as a curriculum option. Health clubs are also providing
more exercise programs designed for kids.

For sure, strength is only one component of fitness? cardiovascular endurance and flexibility are the others. Encourage your child to experience "life" sports? those that can last him a lifetime and that he can participate in with others or alone? e.g., swimming, cycling, skating, walking, etc. Team sports are also great for children because they foster camaraderie, teamwork, and the art of graceful losing, as well as winning.

Alice!
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