



## HELP! MY KIDS ACTUALLY WANT TO WORK OUT!

Aloha Doug:

I have a 12-year-old son who wants to start working out with me this summer. Are there any special guidelines for children his age to follow?

Mahalo from Me & My Son

Aloha to You & Your Son,

While most parents encourage their children to participate in extracurricular athletic activities, they are often unsure as to whether or not they should allow involvement in conventional "adult-type" exercise (weight training, intense cardio, etc.). Or, do children get more than enough exercise by just being active, playful kids?

Regardless of age, the benefits of a properly designed and supervised exercise routine outweigh any potential risks. Naturally, most children absolutely love to move. Physical activity is fun... until adults (or playing sedentary video games) make it something to dread. The benefits for children engaging in regular formal exercise are plentiful and definitely worth the time and effort:

- Improved body composition
- Improved self-image & confidence
- Reduced anxiety, tension, and depression
- Improved circulo-respiratory power & endurance
- Improved muscular strength, endurance, and flexibility
- Improved motor skills & physical performance capacities
- Reduced risk of injury during sports and recreational activities
- Reduced likelihood of developing acute or chronic health conditions
- Improved capacity to cope with the demands of daily physical activities

The list goes on and on. A properly designed and supervised program can provide the foundation for safe, effective, and virtually risk-free exercise sessions for people of all ages, including children.

Research demonstrates that children respond to exercise in a similar manner as adults. Unfortunately, they also respond to inactivity much the same way, with high blood pressure, fatty arterial streaks, obesity, etc. We can all do our best to help children improve their health by teaching them positive attitudes toward activity, increasing awareness of all of the benefits of exercise and, most importantly, making fitness enjoyable and accessible for them.

When designing a training program specific to youth, a few additional guidelines should be considered:

**Supervision:** Proper instruction and qualified adult supervision throughout the program is the most important factor necessary for safe and productive training.

**Development:** An effective training program must be matched to the child's age, maturity level, and interests. Common sense applies, for starters.

**Intensity:** Always keep the workloads moderate at first. Then, adjust the intensity according to age. Children should never perform sudden explosive exercises or maximal lifts. These types of exercises are too severe for the vulnerable epiphyseal growth plates at the ends of the long bones.

**Thermoregulation:** Children are at much greater risk of thermal injury since they have lower skin blood flow rates (limits heat dispersion), a higher threshold for sweating, and lower output of heat-activated sweat glands. Exercise sessions should be reduced in duration and intensity when the relative humidity exceeds 90% or when the air temperature exceeds 85 degrees.

**Hydration:** Children may tend to unknowingly dehydrate themselves during exercise and should therefore be encouraged to drink water before, during, and after exercise (approximately 8 ounces every 20 minutes).

**Circulo-respiratory Training:** Children should be encouraged to participate in sustained activities that use large muscle groups (hiking, swimming, cycling, etc.) on a regular basis. The American College of Sports Medicine recommends that children accumulate a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day.

**Resistance Training:** Typically, if a child can participate in other sports programs, they are also ready for a supervised resistance training program. Basic exercises can be implemented with little or no weight, gradually progressing to a resistance light enough to allow a minimum of 15-20 repetitions for each exercise. There is no reason for children to apply maximal exertion, ever.

Exercise is fun, safe, and appropriate for most children. Be sure to avoid imposing your “grown up” definition of hard work on your child, limit comparisons to other children, and allow your child to gain satisfaction at their personal rate of progress.

Your child's level of health and fitness, both now and as they approach adulthood, is most likely to mimic yours. This is a huge responsibility and my best advice for parents is to always be your child's best example.

Since proper nutrition for kids is also extremely important, and beyond the scope of this column, and I am happy to provide you with a 100% free copy of my book, *Nourish the Whole Child*, which is actually (ironically) co-authored by my mother, Dr. Judy Brunstad (Ph.D. in Holistic Nutrition specializing in children). Please request your free e-book by sending me an email: [Doug@DougJonesFitness.com](mailto:Doug@DougJonesFitness.com)

In Health & With Hope,

Doug :-)

Doug Jones earned his Master's Degree in Exercise Physiology from the University of Maryland and has served professionals and personalities as a concierge fitness trainer for decades. As a resident of Kaua'i and Connecticut, he has helped millions of people learn the secrets of fitness and fat loss, both online and in person. To submit your questions, or for more information, call (808) 652-6453 or visit [www.DougJonesFitness.com](http://www.DougJonesFitness.com)