

Weight Training should Wait until 13

QUESTION: What is your opinion regarding weight lifting/weight training for a twelve-year-old boy? My son is not involved in “organized sports”. At home, he rides his bike and skateboard and plays a little basketball. At school, he runs cross-country and wrestles. He asks me about weight lifting, but I always heard that it was not a good idea in youngsters.

ANSWER: Thank you for asking the questions that so many parents need answered.

Because young and growing kids have growth plates in their joints, they need to be very careful with the amount of torque that is put on each joint. The general rule of thumb is that weight lifting should start at age 13. Even at this age, caution is needed. You should not get started until you meet with your doctor and set up appointments with a professional personal fitness/weight training instructor who has specific knowledge and experience with training kids.

For your knowledge, light resistance with more repetitions will minimize stress to the joints. Also, young kids should not push the repetitions until complete muscle fatigue occurs. This is when the muscle has no more strength left and no more repetitions can be completed. Kids need to stop the repetitions before they get to this point.

There are several things kids can do until they reach that 13-year-old starting age. Exercise using only body resistance is the best. These exercises include push-ups, sit-ups, arm circles, jumping in place, jump roping, etc. Again, stopping before complete muscle failure is important.

Please note that the general age of 13 needs not to be taken literally. Some kids need to wait longer because of different rates of maturity. As always, consult your physician and a professional trainer before starting any exercise program.