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Play Ball?

YOUTH PARTICIPATION in organized sports is waning, and that's not healthy. According to the Aspen Institute and their Project Play initiative, only 24.8 percent of kids were considered "active to a healthy level" in 2016. "Active to a healthy level" is defined as those engaging in high-calorie-burning activities a minimum of 151 times during the year. Regular physical activity benefits health in many ways, including helping build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints, helping control weight and reduce fat, and preventing or delaying the development of high blood pressure.

Adolescents who play sports are eight times more likely to be active at age 24 as those who

do not play sports. Three in four (77 percent) of adults aged 30+ who currently play sports also played sports as school-aged children, whereas only three percent of adults actively engaged in sports did not play when they were young. A comprehensive analysis of the most recent research found that leisure-time physical activity is associated with reduced risk of 13 different types of cancer including breast, colon, liver, and leukemia.

NUMEROUS BENEFITS

Organized sports activity helps children develop and improve cognitive skills and physical activity in general is also associated with improved

academic achievement. Further, such activity can lead to enhanced concentration, attention, and improved classroom behavior. High school athletes are more likely than non-athletes to attend college and get degrees. These benefits extend to the workplace where these same individuals earn more and attain higher levels of leadership. A survey of 400 female corporate executives found that 94 percent played a sport and 61 percent report that sports contributed to their career success.

Physical activity, and organized sports in particular positively affects the personal development of young people through goal setting, leadership, and improved self-esteem.

Unfortunately, children with physical and intellectual disabilities experience about 4.5 times fewer opportunities than those without disabilities.

The reasons for decreased participation include parental worry regarding injuries (concussions in particular) and the expansion of technology. Nearly nine out of 10 parents have concerns about risk of injury (87.9 percent), more than any other issue including the quality and behavior of coaches (81.5 percent), cost (70.3 percent), time commitment (67.9 percent), and the emphasis on winning over having fun (66.1 percent). More than 3.5 million children under age 14 receive medical treatment for sports injuries annually and nearly half of these are due to overuse. Sports specialization at younger ages has contributed greatly to the emergence of overuse/repetitive trauma injuries.

ABOUT CONCUSSIONS

Concern regarding concussions has been fueled by sensational media reports on research that is largely incomplete and results that are inconclusive. I'm afraid there has been a false certainty and lack of independent scientific perspective in the vast amount of media coverage dedicated to this topic. That's not to say that we shouldn't pursue ways to reduce head trauma and make sports safer, overall. Quite the contrary. We have made great strides in understanding sports-related concussions and have instituted policies to ensure the safest possible care and recovery, based on solid scientific evidence.

Each year, about 5-8 percent of high school football players will suffer a concussion, fewer than the incidence in some other high school sports, and remarkably lower than the incidence of concussions from other recreational activities such as biking or in-line skating, and a fraction of head injuries resulting from motor vehicle accidents. We need to keep a sense of perspective and weigh the known and suspected risks against the proven benefits of participation.

To ensure that organized sports are positive and learning experiences for young athletes, be sure to choose age-appropriate activities, provide suitable equipment, consider modification of rules to get kids involved, and do your homework. Check out the situation before you commit. This can include the personality of the coaches, the philosophy of the organization, and the atmosphere at the games. With the right mixture of fun, competition, and learning, organized sports can be an integral part of a young person's physical and mental development. Yes, let's play ball. 



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