Should Young Kids Be Weight Lifting?

There have been several questions raised in regards to youth and weight lifting. Does is increase the chance of injury? What type of exercise is appropriate for our youth? What type of supervision should be required when training kids? These are all valid concerns for parents who want their children to be fit and active, but want answers to the safest way to accomplish such goals. A fair amount of research has been done to provide knowledge and answers for youth weight training.

The National Strength and Conditioning Association completed a study comparing adult and youth common injuries from weight training. The results showed that two-thirds of the injuries to young kids were caused by “dropping” or “pinching” of the weights (Myer, Quatman, Khoury, Wall, & Hewett, 2009). This would indicate that a majority of the safety concerns for youth participating in weight lifting is proper supervision and instruction. The adult group appeared to have fewer injuries caused by negligence or lack of knowledge, and more from non-accident trunk-related injuries (Myer, Quatman, Khoury, Wall, & Hewett, 2009). I believe lifting technique is important at all age levels in order to prevent injury, but the earlier our youth learn proper lifting techniques and general gym safety rules the more comfortable they will be performing these exercises throughout their lives.

In my opinion, supervision and instruction from experienced certified individuals are two of the most important factors when dealing with young children and weight lifting. Teri McCambridge, a pediatric sports medicine specialist, suggests that youth weight training can result in safe strength gains, and that children can begin weight training as early as 7 or 8 years old (Doheny, 2010). Children at a very young age fall into a wide spectrum of physical stature and coordination. Some youth hit their growth spurt at a very young age and have a more difficult time performing dynamic movements. This lack of coordination has the potential to increase the risk of injury to an individual if not properly supervised and instructed.

Another major concern regarding youth weight lifting is the potential for injury to growth plates. The growth plate can be three to five times weaker in youth weight lifters, which increases the chance of injury from improper loads or poor lifting technique (Faigenbaum & Myer, 2010). It is very important that young children do not try and lift heavy loads when weight training. The safest methods would be to perform the exercise without any weight until proper form and understanding of the lift is exhibited. Once this is established lifting lighter weight at higher repetitions will decrease the risk of injury (Doheny, 2010). Starting at the basics is crucial for safe lifting and proper neuromuscular development.

In summary, kids are able to begin weight lifting at a young age. The key points to remember is that close supervision is mandatory in order to reduce accidental injuries and the goal is not to lift heavy loads, but rather to learn the proper technique for the exercise. Participating in weight training at a young age can build a solid foundation for exercise in the future, as well as improve neuromuscular development, balance, and coordination.

References:

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