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Pediatricians Issue New Rules on Strength Training

(Reuters) Strength training for children and adolescents can be appropriate and beneficial in some cases, but young athletes must learn proper technique and be supervised by specially qualified instructors, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

Children who have not yet reached skeletal maturity shouldn't engage in power lifting, body building, or efforts to lift a maximum amount of weight in a single repetition, the AAP warns. Also, they add, any young person involved in strength training should be advised against using steroids or other performance-enhancing substances.

The AAP issued a revised statement on strength training for young people in this month's issue of its journal, *Pediatrics*.

Any child or adolescent should undergo a complete medical evaluation by a pediatrician or family doctor before starting strength training, the physicians' group states, and this is particularly important for children with certain medical problems such as congenital heart disease, uncontrolled hypertension (high blood pressure), or a history of cancer.

Children's control of their posture and balance has matured to an adult level by age 7 or 8, the group states, so "it seems logical that strength programs need not start before achievement of those skills." Young athletes should also have reached a degree of proficiency in their sport, they add, in order for strength training to be worthwhile.

Strength training programs must target all major muscle groups, the AAP adds, and every workout session should begin and end with a 10- to 15-minute warm up and cool down.

Also, the group states, young people should practice an exercise without any resistance and then gradually build up weight once they have perfected the technique. Most strength training machines and gym equipment aren't appropriate for children, the group adds, while free weights are a better option because they allow adding weight in small increments and building strength for certain movements specific to a sport.

Finally, the group states, trainers must be certified by a recognized group such as the American Council on Exercise, the National Council on Strength and Fitness, or the National Academy of Sports Medicine, and this certification should include qualification in pediatric strength training.

