

Physical Activity and Sports for Girls

Did you know that women who play sports?

1. like themselves more
2. have more self-confidence
3. suffer less depression
4. are 60% less likely to get breast cancer
5. have decreased risk of suffering from heart attacks, strokes, back problems, and osteoporosis
6. are more likely to leave a man who beats them
7. are less likely to get pregnant before they want to
8. are more likely to have higher grades and go on to college

By encouraging your daughter to be physically active and participate in sports, you are helping your daughter build mental, physical, and emotional assets that she can call upon later in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

Your daughter's self-esteem – a perception of self-worth – develops gradually as she matures and interacts with others. If you, as a parent, communicate approval, liking and respect, your child will develop positive feelings of self-confidence and self-worth. Conversely, if your daughter is belittled or sent the message that she is not worthwhile, she will tend to view herself as unworthy. While self-esteem is most strongly developed at a young age, people and society continue to affect and influence self-esteem.

Parents play a crucial role in developing the special talents of their children, especially in the case of

daughters. Two general pieces of advice can be offered.

1. Fight against stereotypes and attitudes that limit women's potential. For example, point out your disapproval of incompetent "dumb blond" stereotypes, and your admiration for truly competent women. Include women who participate in physical activity and sports as models for your daughter.
2. Find opportunities for your daughter to develop her abilities. If she has a special interest, find a program or lesson to develop that interest. This is a common family characteristic of both girls and boys who go on to national recognition in science, music, and sports: their parents recognized their interest and talent in a specific area when they were about 8 to 12 years old, and managed to find special tutoring or other opportunities for them. The preschool and early school years are times to offer opportunities for your daughter to experiment with different activities to see which interest her.

Your Encouragement NOW Is Essential

You can help your preschool daughter realize the enjoyment and benefit from physical activity and sports.

Consider:

- having her join a soccer or little league t-ball team
- taking her to swimming lessons
- teaching her to ride a bike
- having her join the family on a hike or cross-country ski trek

- going to the park so she can climb on the jungle gym
- playing kick the ball in the yard
- jumping rope with her
- enrolling her in a dance or gymnastics class

Encourage Girls to Play Sports and Be

Physically Active (Note to parents of boys: Many of these tips work well with sons, too.)

To encourage your preschool daughter,

- dress her for activity, not for sitting on the sidelines.
- select day care and preschool settings that are non-sexist (that treat boys and girls as equally capable).
- expose your daughter to successful and active women.

Photograph your child being active.

- Enlarge it.
- Frame it.
- Be proud of it.

Actively support your daughter's involvement in physical activity.

- Buy her good equipment, not her brother's hand-me-downs.
- Go and watch her games and activities.
- Consider volunteering to assist with a team or activity.
- Make physical activity/sports a priority in your daughter's life.
- Help her learn the fundamental skills of running, throwing, catching, and kicking.

Be an active role model yourself.

- Mom's participation in sport increases participation rates of her child by 22%.
- Dad's participation in sport increases participation rates of his child by 11%.
- Model physical activity by being active yourself. (Make physical activity such as walking, swimming, biking, skiing a part of your life.)
- Plan active vacations or weekend excursions.
- Emphasize fun and fitness rather than competition and slimming attributes.

- Encourage your daughter to try a variety of new activities, helping her to acquire the skills and equipment she needs to participate.
- Avoid comments about your daughter's body size and shape.
- Love and support her just the way she is.
- Don't undermine her confidence and take the joy out of playing by telling her "she throws like a girl." Help her to learn the skills she needs to enjoy sports.

Introduce your daughter to active women.

- Expose your daughter to women who are athletes, coaches, officials, and leaders in sports.
- Buy books about women athletes.

Watch women's sports events with your daughter.

- Take your daughter to women's sports competitions in your community.
- Read the sports pages with her and follow the performances of women athletes.
- Watch TV programs featuring women athletes.

The President's Council on Physical Fitness issued a report making these recommendations:

- Girls should be encouraged to get involved in sports and physical activity at an early age.
- Opportunities that enhance girls being physically active must be developed and supported.
- Involvement in sports and physical activity has tremendous potential to enhance a girl's sense of self-esteem.
- Girls participate not only for competitive reasons, but to get in shape, socialize, improve skills and have fun. All motives must be respected and validated by parents, coaches and other adults.
- Coaches and physical educators should give girls equal access and attention.

Sources:

Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity.

<http://www.caaws.ca/Girls/encourage.htm> (2000)

The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Report. Physical Activity & Sport in the Lives of Girls. 1997.

Dave Riley, University of Wisconsin-Extension. "Nurture Daughter's Talent." May, 1999.

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