



YOUTHFIRST

25 Benefits of Girls Playing Sports

Volume 1, Series 11

7th and 8th Girls

1. Sports are FUN.
2. Girls and women who play sports have a more positive body image than girls and women who don't participate.
3. Girls who participate in sports have higher self-esteem and pride in themselves.
4. Research suggests that physical activity is an effective tool for reducing the symptoms of stress and depression among girls.
5. Playing sports teaches girls how to take risks and be aggressive.
6. Sport is where girls can learn goal-setting, strategic thinking and the pursuit of excellence in performance and other achievement-oriented behaviors - critical skills necessary for success in the workplace.
7. Playing sports teaches math skills.
8. Sports help girls develop leadership skills.
9. Sports teach girls team-work.
10. Regular physical activity in adolescence can reduce girls' risk for obesity.
11. Physical activity appears to decrease the initiation of cigarette smoking in adolescents girls.
12. Research suggests that girls who participate in sports are more likely to experience academic success and graduate from high school than those who do not play sports.
13. Teenage female athletes are less than half as likely to get pregnant as female non-athletes (5% and 11% respectively).
14. Teenage female athletes are more likely to report that they had never had sexual intercourse than non-athletes (54% and 41%).
15. Teenage female athletes are more likely to experience their first sexual intercourse later in adolescence than female non-athletes.
16. High school sports participation may help prevent osteoporosis.
17. Women who exercise report being happier than those who do not exercise.

**Coaches Learning
about Youth Sports
The Sports
Education and
Leadership Program
at UNLV**

For more information:

- Point your mouse to:
www.womenof.com
- Check out www.cfc-efc.ca
- Click on www.womenssportsfoundation.org

For all the
updated news
click on
www.YouthFirst.org

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YES WE CAN

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has the right to recreation opportunities.

Girls' experience of sports

- Many girls love sports, and their numbers are growing.
- Girls often view competition in sports differently from boys. They tend to worry about competing against their best friend, being yelled at by the coach and wondering if they will be more or less popular depending on what sport they play and how good they are at that sport. Girls also often worry more about disappointing team mates and making mistakes.
- Girls and women often view competition as a way to honour the game and appreciate their competitors rather than as a "winner take all" proposition.

Benefits of sports for girls

- Active, athletic girls have been found to have higher self-esteem, more confidence, higher achievement test scores, less depression, improved mental health, more academic success and greater lifetime earning potential.
- Girls who play sports are also more likely to turn away from risky behavior, be it unprotected sex, promiscuity, or experimenting with drugs and alcohol.

How participating in sport and physical activity can help children

- Recreation and sport activities have an obvious positive link to excellent physical growth in children through the development of gross motor skills (running, jumping and other use of large muscles), strength and endurance.
- Participation in physical activity also leads to improved body image. Girls in sport often have a better appreciation of a strong body that is bigger and has more muscles than what is depicted as the "ideal" female image.
- Physical activities also promote social and emotional growth. Two of the most important indicators of healthy social and emotional development are the resiliency of a child and a child's opportunity to enjoy caring relationships with adults who are important to that child. Both of these can be developed through participation in organized physical activities.
- Recreation activities provide a safe and supportive environment for children and youth to explore their strengths, develop skills and test their limits. Children's self esteem is nurtured by the mastery of age-appropriate skills and the achievement of reasonable goals. This mastery contributes to the development of a resilient child. This means that a physically active child, regardless of circumstance, is more likely to thrive.

Physical Activity and Youth:

- Recreation and physical activity is particularly important to helping adolescents through the years of transition to adulthood. The ongoing social relationships that develop from participation in physical activity and recreation provide a core of social resources that can support and protect children and youth as they mature. (CCSD, 1996; CP/RA, 1995)
- High self-esteem, which can be developed by participation in sport and recreation, can lead to a higher level of motivation and can buffer young people against adverse influences such as substance abuse and delinquent behaviour. (Marsh, 1990)
- Physical activity and recreation provides youth with the opportunity to develop leadership skills by participating as coaches and team leaders.
- Once children fall behind in their "recreational" skill development, they are less likely to pursue sports and arts programs at school because they cannot keep up with their peers, they do not make the teams, and their

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Girls Continued...

18. Women who exercise believe they have more energy and felt they were in excellent health more often than non-exercising women.
19. Women who are active in sports and recreational activities as girls feel greater confidence in their physical and social selves than those who were sedentary as kids.
20. Women who exercise miss fewer days of work.
21. Research supports that regular physical activity can reduce hyperlipidemia (high levels of fat in blood).
22. Recreational physical activity may decrease a woman's chance of developing breast cancer.
23. Women who exercise weigh less than non-exercising women.
24. Women who exercise have lower levels of blood sugar, cholesterol, triglycerides and have lower blood pressure than non-exercising women
25. Regular exercise improves the overall quality of life.

Girls and Sports Continued...

and their self-esteem suffers. Another consequence is that these children have time on their hands - time they may use getting into trouble. (MCZCR 1999)

How to support girls in sports

- Buy a Girl a Ball Not a Doll
- Encouraging Your Daughter - provide good equipment and watch girls' games.
- Photograph your child being active
- Take her to the park and be active with her
- Be an active role model yourself
- Emphasize fun, fitness and skill challenges
- Introduce her to active women
- Watch women's sport events on TV with your daughter

Barriers to girls participation in sports

- Lack of media coverage of female sporting heroes
- Lack of role models. Research has shown that older athletes that work with younger athletes improve both their leadership skills and increase younger girls physical activity.
- Need for quality daily physical education programs for young girls at school
- Need for increased levels of corporate funding for female athletes
- Females at an early age under-value and underestimate their capacity (and potential) for competency in physical activity. This view is shared by others in society, including male peers. As a result, a girl's competency in physical activity constantly falls further behind her male peers.

Girls and Sports...Tips for Parents

Why should girls participate in sports? Higher self esteem, lower pregnancy rates, healthier bodies and minds...the reasons are many.

But parents and other concerned adults may not always know how to engage girls in sports. Many mothers did not have the chance to play sports themselves, and so are unfamiliar with the issues that arise in athletics. Many fathers must overcome their own lingering stereotypes about girls and athletics in order to give their daughters an equal opportunity on the playing field.

For answers, they can turn to *Raising Our Athletic Daughters: How Sports Can Build Self-Esteem and Save Girls' Lives*. This comprehensive book covers issues facing girls in sports from the preschool through the high school and college years.

Authors Jean Zimmerman and Gil Reavill suggest these tips for parents of preschoolers:

- be active in sports yourself
- make fitness part of your family's everyday life
- encourage your daughter to play with boys and in mixed-gender groups
- point out examples of female athletes and athletic achievement
- teach basic sports skills in a relaxed, fun atmosphere.

Tips for parents of preadolescents:

- ensure that girl and boy athletes receive equal support
- search out sports programs that emphasize growth, learning and the positive value of fun
- attend and take interest in her games and practices

choose coed or single-sex programs according to your daughter's comfort level, and what will contribute most to her learning and growth.

