Safe Weight Training For Kids

by Eve Lees

As a fitness instructor and former competitive bodybuilder, I encourage my own children when they show an interest in "mom's favorite exercise" - weight training. Children can get the same benefits from a weight training program as adults: improved strength, power and coordination, increased energy and endurance and control of body fat. Teaching them that our home weights are not toys and how to use them properly is an investment toward their future good health.

Training with weights strengthens bone as well as muscles. The younger your children start the more guarantee they'll have of stronger bones in later years. In fact, exercise seems to be a more important factor in building strong bones than diet. That's the finding of the University of Saskatchewan's Dr Don Bailey, a leading Canadian researcher on osteoporosis.

When lifting a weight, the compressive forces combine with the contraction of muscle. This seems to stimulate formation in the bones that directly receive the mechanical strain. Studies on athletes who use weights find they have thicker, stronger bones than athletes who don't use them.

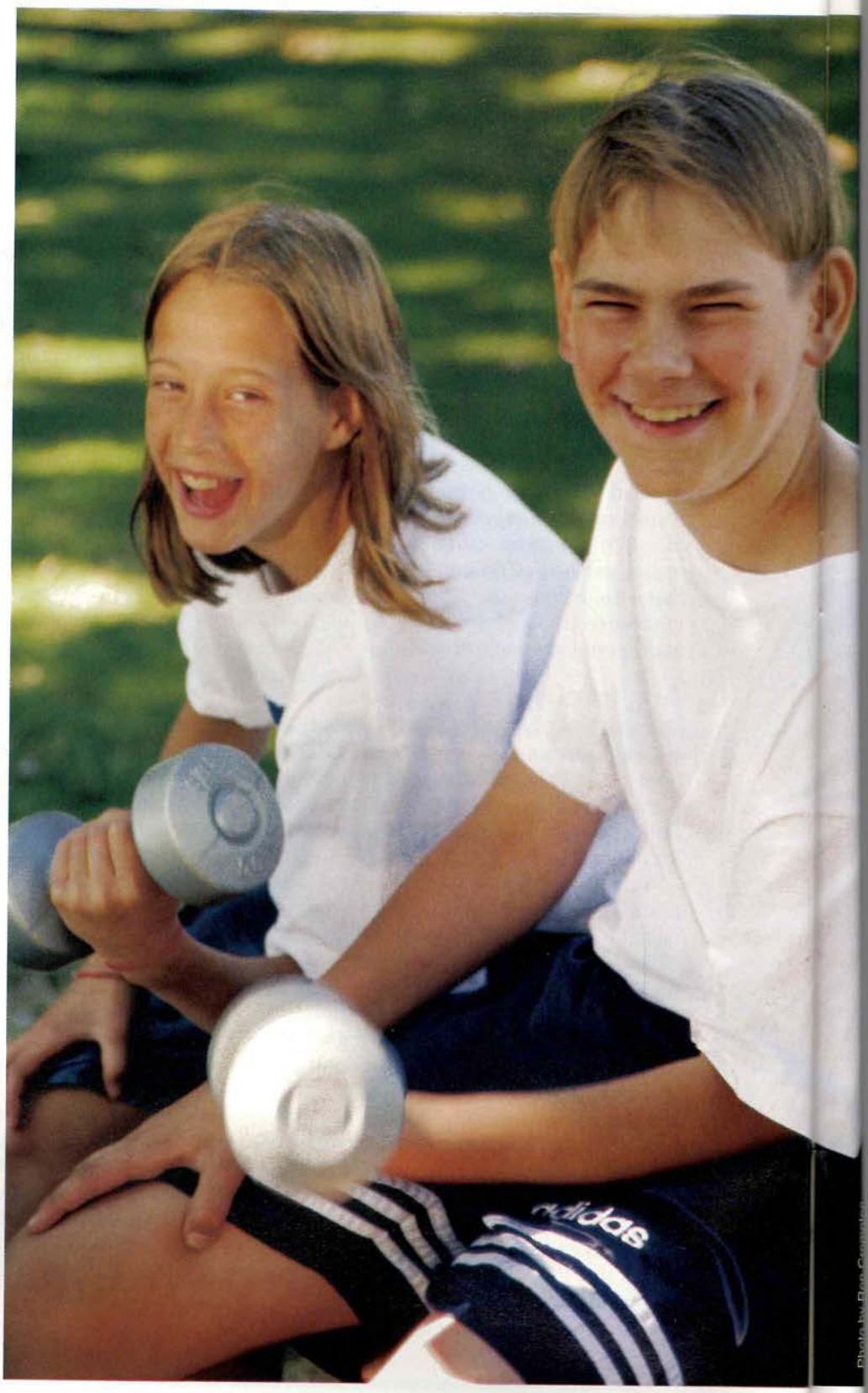
Light is Right!

However, children can't train with weights the way an adult can. A child's ligaments and bones are still developing. Using heavy weights can interfere with proper bone development.

Growth cartilage allows for growth in the length of a child's bones and acts as a shock absorber, helping to distribute force equally through the bones. Cartilage, particularly in a young skeleton, is weaker than bone. Compression from heavy weight lifting may result in deformity or lack of bone growth. Most cartilage injuries in children occur from doing heavy overhead lifts.

Using big weights builds big muscles, but a child lacks the muscle-building hormones for this process. Lighter lifting gives other benefits - for both children and adults.

A child's lower back is particularly susceptible to injury. Poor technique, using heavy weights or an unbalanced muscle focus (not exercising opposing or supporting muscles equally) is the usual cause of back injury.



Training Tips for Parents and Kids

There is no set minimum age at which to start a weight training program. A child must be emotionally mature and able to accept and follow directions. Most fitness professionals suggest the age of 10, but no two children are alike. Depending on their maturity, some six-year-olds may be ready to begin a supervised workout, while others may find it hard to grasp the fundamentals.

Properly explain and demonstrate the equipment and exercises. You should have a good understanding of weight training yourself before teaching a child, otherwise consult with a certified instructor.

Emphasize safe, effective technique. Insist on quality not quantity: technique is more important than the amount of weight lifted. Praise the child when an exercise is correctly performed. Never dwell on the weight being used. De-emphasize competition and focus on individual goals. A workout diary helps a child see and appreciate personal accomplishments.

Use the workout time to teach kids about their bodies. This could spark a lifetime interest in fitness. Explain the mechanics of the muscle being used. Stress the importance of slow and controlled movements. Give guidelines on breathing. Discuss injuries that can occur and how to prevent them.

Machines are not necessary. Use standard equipment (barbells or dumbbells) or body-weight exercises: modified pull-ups, push-ups and abdominal curls.

Starting Out

For the first one to four weeks, do only one exercise for each of the large muscle groups: legs, back and chest. Do one set of 10 to 15 repetitions per exercise, using little or no weight. Demonstrate exercises for the abdominals and lower back.

The weight training session should last 20 to 30 minutes. This includes the warm-up and the cool-down period of stretching. Exercise once or twice weekly.

Progress Slowly

Over the next four to eight weeks the child can start doing two sets for each exercise, but keep the repetitions in the 10 to 15 range. Introduce exercises for the smaller muscle groups: shoulders and arms. The correct technique for each new exercise must be learned before a child even picks up the weight. Practice with a broomstick.

Keep the progression gradual and at a rate suitable to the child's level of understanding. Progressing slowly also avoids injury and any discouraging muscle soreness.

Advancement Tips

Before advancing be confident the child can properly perform the basic weight training exercises, is comfortable with the equipment and shows an understanding of the skills learned.

After a few months, increase the exercise sessions to three times weekly, if the child desires. However, studies show weight training need only be done twice weekly to reap the benefits. Always monitor children closely and don't allow them to over train.

Advance to three sets of eight to 12 repetitions for each exercise. Do one or two exercises for each muscle group. As strength improves and an exercise becomes too easy, increase repetitions, increase the number of sets, introduce new exercises or increase the weight in two to five pound increments. If you choose to increase weight, the child should be able to comfortably lift the required number of repetitions. Keep in mind that maximal lifting (lifting to exhaustion) is not safe for children, especially for those under the age of 16.

Encourage participation in other playtime activities. Biking or playing in the park conditions the heart and improves balance and agility while keeping the fun in fitness. Try setting a good example by being active yourself (the weight training recommendations in this article can also apply to beginner adults).

According to a report in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, the rate of obesity among children aged six to 11 has doubled since 1980. Obesity has increased 40 per cent among those aged 12 to 17. Activity - any kind - should be encouraged to start a lifetime of good health. ■

Eve Lees is a fitness instructor and former competitive bodybuilder. She lives in Surrey BC.

...a drug free
Natural Hair Restorer
that *honestly works.*

Hair loss and thinning hair are experiences that affect people, traumatically, leaving them prey to unscrupulous operators and drug companies whose only aim is outright exploitation.

MARGO products, instead, offer a time proven

Herbal alternative,

free from ominous *side effects.*

It's a combination of deep acting lotions which dissolve salt and sebum follicle plugs, the hair enemy #1. At the same time the hair benefits from the enzymes, minerals and vitamins found both in the lotions and **EQUIMIL,** our food supplement.

It's an ancient tradition that will honestly work to help

RESTORE YOUR HAIR

and regain your confidence

THE NATURAL WAY!

July only: starter kit as low as $25.95



Or ask for the **WEDGE** the full kit, at your Health Food Store, but insist on **MARGO** or phone our toll free number for info:

1-800-667-1022 our mailing address is MARGO International, 13719 Lakepine Rd, Winfield, BC V4V 1A3

Distributed by Christmas Natural Foods Wholesale

for more information circle 177 on reply card