

Best age to begin youth weight training?

Over the years I have frequently been asked what the recommended age is at which young people may begin lifting weights. There is no true definitive age for beginning weightlifting as the beginning requirements vary little after the early teens.

For our purposes here let me define “lifting weights” as the performance of the true weightlifting movements known as the “snatch” and the “clean and jerk” or lifts that are derivatives of these two lifts. The back squat, bench press, and dead-lift (officially known as the power-lifts) would also fall under this definition. Other means of resistance training especially those requiring the person to be seated in a machine should be used minimally or not at all, our youth spend too much time sitting down as it is and having children resistance train while seated is a practice that is increasingly believed to be counterproductive.

Here are some points to consider:

- **Mental readiness:** The number one aspect, in my experience, is mental readiness. A person should be able to listen and follow directions accurately and be capable of understanding the reasoning behind what they are being taught. Once able, the person should also show enough interest to perform various skill development lifts and flexibility training on their own on a daily basis.
- **Posture:** Good posture is the next requirement needed before starting a weightlifting program.
- I find it quite common that people will have postural deficiencies that will not allow them to begin lifting safely. The problem may be due to poor postural habits such as slouching while sitting and walking or weakness in the postural muscle chain. Correcting posture is absolutely critical for anyone before weightlifting can be started.
- **Core strength:** The importance of core strength is on par with good posture. Core strength is often misunderstood as the strength of the stomach muscles. True core strength involves the musculature of the trunk (the lower chest down to the mid thighs) and should be developed in all three planes. Improving core strength will help improve posture when an emphasis is placed on developing a core strength that can maintain stable, efficient leverages throughout the body. As with posture, core strength must be adequate before any type of external load is applied with the use of weights.
- **Flexibility:** With an association often made between weightlifting and being muscle-bound or “tight” the need for flexibility for weightlifting often surprises people but the development of flexibility is essential for safe, productive lifting technique.

As far as motivational reasons for weightlifting or any kind of resistance training, be careful. I prefer to see young people decide for themselves on whether to start a weight training program. The decision for a youth to begin weight training should not involve convenience for the parent who wants to head to the gym but has nowhere to go with their child or wants to develop a future training partner. Lifting with your kids can only be truly fulfilling if they themselves truly wish to initiate the process.

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