



## How to introduce teenagers to weight training

**S**trength training is an important component of a healthy lifestyle. According to the Mayo Clinic, strength training helps people reduce their body fat, increase their lean muscle mass and efficiently burn calories. In fact, in its 2018 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans report, the Department of Health and Human Services recommends all adults perform moderate or greater-intensity muscle strengthening activities on two or more days per week.

Recognizing the benefits of strength training, many parents encourage their teenagers to begin strength training regimens. If some scoff at the notion of promoting strength training to youngsters whose bodies are still developing, they shouldn't, as the DHHS recommends children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 17 include muscle-strengthening exercises as part of their daily physical activity on at least three days per week.



A teenagers' introduction to weight training should be different than an adult's. So adults who began weight training regimens in their 20s after their bodies had fully matured should not ask their teenage children or teenagers in their care to approach weight training in the same way they did. In fact, Stanford Children's Health notes that the human skeleton isn't mature until a person reaches his or her early 20s. As a result, lifting too much weight

before the body reaches that maturity point can stress joints and ligaments and may even separate growth plates.

Safety should be a priority when introducing children to weight training. Stanford Children's Health even notes that it's important for adults and teenagers to recognize that weight training is different from weightlifting and bodybuilding. Weight training is an integral part of a total fitness regimen that aims to build musculoskeletal strength, while weightlifting and bodybuilding are competitive sports that focus on high-intensity training. Make sure teenagers understand this distinction, as enthusiastic teens might conduct some research on their own. If they are unaware that weight training and weightlifting are

different, they might be risking injury and long-term consequences because they're following advice designed for competitive weightlifters rather than for teenagers interested in weight training. Supervision is another precaution parents should take when introducing teenagers to weight training. According to Stanford Children's Health, a good weight-training program for teens will focus on toning muscles with light weights. Teens should never aspire to "bulk up," as their bodies are not ready to handle the training necessary to build all that muscle. Unfortunately, teens might feel pressure to add bulk if they see classmates or adults in the gym who are considerably larger. That's why it's important for parents to go to the gym with their teens during weight training sessions.

A gradual approach is also an effective way to help teen bodies acclimate to weight training. Encourage teens to start with simple body weight exercises, such as push-ups, before moving on to free weights and weight machines. Stanford Children's Health notes that teen strength training programs should emphasize proper techniques and work different muscle groups on different days. Two to three weight training sessions per week on alternating days should be enough for teen bodies.

Weight training can help teenagers build strong bodies. When paired with supervision, patience and safety, weight training programs can help teens grow into strong adults.

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