

Strength training the right way

When it comes to strength training and kids, there are numerous myths and rumors — especially about training with weights.

Fortunately, in the past few years experts have come out in force to set the record straight and put forth some basic guidelines for parents to consider.

According to Doug Wolf, certified athletic trainer and certified strength and conditioning specialist at Nationwide Children's Hospital Sports Medicine, "The main thing parents need to know is that the primary goals of any strength training program should be to improve health and prevent injury. For those who are involved in sports, increased performance is a direct byproduct of a well-designed program. Injury prevention and an increase in performance is really a marriage that can't be separated."

The latest guidelines suggest that your child may be ready to participate in strength training activities

when he or she is as young as 7 or 8 years old.

"Generally, children are ready to do strength training activities when they are old enough to be involved in group sports," Wolf said. "However, strength training with weights should be put off until a child can master the movements without weights."

If you think your child is interested in and ready for strength training, the best thing parents can do is talk with a qualified expert in order to design an appropriate program. When judging whether someone is qualified to work with your child, it's important to take into account his or her education, experience and background. Wolf often reminds parents that children aren't miniature adults. Although someone may have experience coaching college athletes in the weight room, that individual may not be the best person to design a program for your child.

In the past, it was

thought that children shouldn't do strength training because it might stunt their growth and lead to serious, lifelong injury. Today, many experts agree that a proper strength training program can be effective in increasing body control, and help improve social and emotional development.

Strength training isn't without its risks, but these can be minimized by providing your child with a well-designed program and appropriate adult supervision. "When done right, strength training can be a very productive outlet for kids," Wolf said. "It's something they can enjoy long-term."

When you're considering a strength training program for your child, start with his or her primary care physician.

Nationwide Children's Hospital provided the information for this column.

Common causes for kids' injuries in the weight room:

- Horseplay
- Heavy overhead lifts
- Improper technique
- Heavy, explosive lifts
- Maximal lifts

Ways to avoid injury in the weight room:

- Appropriate adult supervision
- Emphasize technique rather than more weight
- Keep the program interesting and short to keep your child focused

