

## NEAT

### April- Strength and Flexibility

#### FACT Sheet

A well balanced fitness routine includes aerobic activity (to get the heart pumping), strength training and flexibility exercises. Strength and flexibility training has numerous benefits for children such as:

- Prevents injuries
- A quicker recovery after exercise
- A decrease in tension
- Better balance and coordination
- Helps with posture
- Increases muscle/bone strength and endurance
- Improves motor skills
- Prevents cardiovascular disease
- Reduces and controls high blood pressure and obesity
- Promotes healthy lifestyle practices

**Strength** training does not mean bulking up or weightlifting, which can strain a child's developing muscles and tendons. A child can actually use their own weight to build muscles and strength. Simple activities like gymnastics, climbing trees, jumping rope and climbing on a jungle gym help a child get stronger. Exercises like pushups, sit-ups or squats can also increase muscle tone. Older kids can do more intense strength training and even incorporate light weights. However, children under the age of eight should only use their own body weight as resistance for strength training activities.

**Flexibility** is the ability to move joints and muscles to their maximum range of motion. A person's flexibility can be maintained or increased by proper stretching. Stretching and flexibility is important for everyone, especially children.

In general there are two main forms of stretches; 1) dynamic and 2) static. Dynamic stretches use slow and controlled movements to stretch the muscle. Examples of dynamic stretches include a brisk walk, jogging, arm circles, high knees and hip rotations. Regardless of age it is smart for everyone to do a warm up with dynamic stretches for 5-10 minutes before any form of exercise. Warm ups help increase the blood flow to the muscles. Static stretching is a method where the person stretches a specific body part and holds the position for little while. New evidence suggests static stretches before exercise maybe actually cause injuries because the muscles haven't had time to warm up. To be safe static stretches can be performed after dynamic stretches or during a post-work out cool down.

The development of the child determines what types of stretches should be performed.

#### **Ages 5-10**

This age group has a hard time sitting still so *static stretches should be avoided*. Instead there should be an emphasis on dynamic stretches like arm circles, skipping and high knees.

#### **Ages 10-13**

During this age range kids may be gaining more weight and increasing muscle strength. Flexibility exercises should be increased with this age group.

#### **Ages 13-15**

Adolescents at this age are going through major growth spurts. Muscles and supporting connective tissues cannot keep up with the bone growth, which causes "growing pain." Flexibility can help strengthen the areas that are most susceptible to pain; hamstrings, quadriceps and muscles of the lumbar spine. A rapid height increase can put the teen at an increase risk of injury and poor posture but flexibility exercises can help!

#### **Ages 15+**

At this age flexibility exercises can be used to target muscle groups prone to injury or they can help with training for a specific sport.