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Alfred Nobel patented dynamite in 1867, having started experimenting with nitroglycerin in 1860. The Nobel Prize bears his name



Avoid feeling the strain

Expert advice to help your kids enjoy sports without paying for it in later life



We're constantly hearing about the problem of a sedentary lifestyle among children in the UAE. A recent study even suggested that as many as one in three children in this country is overweight or obese. As a result, many events aim to raise the awareness of 'lifestyle diseases' like diabetes. Yet for kids who cram five sporting activities into a week, with extra training at the weekend, overdoing it is a danger at the other end of the spectrum.

One physiotherapy centre in Dubai says it has recently seen a marked increase in kids being treated for sports injuries. "The thing in Dubai is that there are two polar opposites," explains Robyn Stanford, a physiotherapist at Optimal Therapy, the physio centre at Optimal Fitness gym in Dubai's Studio City. "There are injuries that come from kids doing nothing, being inactive, but the flipside is the kids that are doing everything and are being pushed too hard."

Having worked with desert ultramarathon runners in the past, Robyn is well versed with overtraining and overuse. If these occur in young bodies, and are left unchecked, she says they can lead to issues in later life such as bodily imbalances.

"The whole body is a pulley and lever system in terms of moving and generating power," explains Robyn. "When a child is growing, the bones are obviously getting longer. Imagine that your muscles are having to get longer at the same pace, but still maintain the stability of the joint and their strength. It is a very volatile and risky time."

"[In children] there are 'growth plates' at the end of each bone, but if there is inflammation around the plate or there is a constant pull from tight muscles, this can cause serious injury. If you are doing a lot of impact activity, it is constantly pulling at that growth plate. Gymnasts, for instance, struggle with that," she says, giving one example of a sport-specific injury that is often reported by young people.

The infamous video of Tiger Woods smashing a golf ball at just two years old may prompt parents to believe that

if they want their child to excel, they should be kicking a football or hitting a tennis ball before they are out of nappies. Yet the experts say specialising too young can do more harm than good.

"Regular activities and organised sports offer great benefits and ensure your child gets exercise on a regular basis," says Kirsty MacPherson-Wright, co-founder and wellness expert at Phoenix Rising, which runs yoga-based exercise classes for kids.

"Avoid allowing a child to specialise in one sport or activity at a very early age, or training and practising too hard, too often in one sport. Repetitive motion and a lot of training can result in injuries such as tendonitis and stress fractures, at a time when the body is still growing. Specialising in one sport too early can also lead to lopsided skill development."

Parents should aim to be a force for encouragement and not pressure, she says.

"I recognise that a lot of today's young athletes are self-driven and want to perform well. However, others often seem to have competition thrust upon them.

Parents who were sporty or good athletes themselves, or who are trying to make up for their failed athletic youth, attempt to live vicariously through their children and tend to push their kids. For those children that do want to perform well and make the choice to practice and play regularly, then it is really important to encourage the child to stretch before and after exercise, take some rest days and, most importantly, learn to listen to their body."

Both Robyn and Kirsty advise encouraging your kid to stretch every day. Why not lead by example? See the box below for a few suggestions.

What's more, in the glitzy UAE teens can feel a lot of pressure to look their best, which can result in them hitting the gym. While the debate rages about what age kids can safely lift weights, if your teen is putting hours in pumping iron then a little supervision may be called for. "The biggest problem is if it's done with bad technique. Teens tend to work out the visible muscles such as the biceps and the pectorals, and that tends to bring the shoulders forward. The vast majority of muscles are forgotten," says Robyn.

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A STRETCH A DAY KEEPS THE ACHES AT BAY: THREE TO TRY

● **Chair pose:** A great way to warm up and help prevent injury. Bend knees and sit your bum back into a gentle squat, making sure knees don't jut out over toes. Hold for a few counts. Then jump up in the air and rotate the body 180 degrees, landing with knees bent, not locked, and toes pointing forward. Do two sets of ten reps.



● **Butterfly:** This pose will provide a good stretch to the legs and spine, and also the inner thighs and hip flexors, especially when the 'butterfly wings' (the knees) are flapped up and down in between curling the spine over and aiming the forehead towards the big toes.



● **Child's pose:** What better posture for a child to perform? It gives a soft stretch to the ankles, hips and thighs while relaxing the mind and body.



Optimal Therapy offers 'prehabilitation' biomechanical assessments to help identify any body imbalances. optimalfitness.ae
Phoenix Rising's 'Spread Your Wings' combines children's yoga, pilates and acro-yoga. phoenix-rising.me

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