

Youth Running Guidelines: Preventing Sports Injuries

Adapted from "Youth Movement," a Runner's World article by Marc Bloom, 2007, author of Young Runners: The Complete Guide to Healthy Running for Kids from Ages 5-18.

Why is it important to moderate children's running:

Children ages 5-14 account for 40 percent of all sports-related injuries, with female runners having the highest rate of injury (over even football players).

Frequency, Intensity, Time and Balance:

- 2-3 sessions a week
- Start 5-10 minutes, gradually increasing to 20-30
- Keep distance and intensity moderate
- Include exercises that incorporate alternate muscle groups

Age level recommendations:

Preschoolers: Preschoolers should only run for play.

Ages 5-8: Running spurts should be short with many breaks (walking, listening to stories, stretching, performing exercises). Running should involve play. Example: incorporating exercises for alternating muscle groups, running, and walking, start small with 5-10 minutes of exercise, and build to 20-30 minutes, running up to half a track-distance (200 meters) at a time.

Ages 9-12: This age group can handle training for a one-mile event with an emphasis on pacing and enjoyment. It is key to balance running with other sports and exercises. At this age, children's long bones are in growth and are sensitive. Be careful to increase distances gradually. At the upper limits of this age group, children can begin to work towards a 5k distance.

Ages 13-14: Many young teens are still in a growing-phase and precautions should be taken to ease into mileage. This group can comfortably work on 5k distances and as they pass into puberty, their bodies are better able to handle longer, more competitive racing. With certified coaches, young teens can aim for 10K distances, with 2-3 runs a week.

Ages 15-18: With certified coaches, teenagers can safely increase distances and intensity adapted to individual abilities. Emphasis should be placed on whole body fitness.