

Preparing for sport

Fact Sheet

All young athletes should take part in proper training before joining any competition or games. This helps them build skills safely and reduces the risk of injury, and should contain²;

- Warm up
- Skills practice
- Game like activity
- Cool down

Warm up and cool down

Warming up at the start of training or before competition helps prepare young athletes physically and mentally for exercise¹. A proper warm-up will, raise body temperature, increase blood flow to muscles, prepare the body for movement and reduce the risk of injury¹.

A good warm-up should begin with low-intensity activity such as walking or light jogging, then gradually build to sport-specific movements. It should also include gentle stretching¹. It will reduce muscle stiffness, help clear waste products produced during exercise, and support a smoother return to resting heart rate. A cool-down should include easy walking or jogging followed by light stretching.

Why stretch?

Regular stretching improves flexibility, supports good movement patterns, and prepares the body for physical activity. Stretching is most effective when the body is warm and should be done before and after exercise. Stretching should be gentle with a combination of dynamic and static stretches¹. Proper stretching helps young athletes move freely, perform better, and reduce the risk of injury.

Modified sports

Children and young people should take part in modified sports that match their stage of development^{1,2}. These modifications help ensure they can learn skills safely, enjoy the game, and build confidence. Sports can be modified by adapting playing fields, rules, equipment and the duration of games to cater for varying skill levels². These modifications help create a positive, safe and developmentally appropriate sporting experience for all children.

There are many modified sports that children can participate in. Some include:

- Auskick (**AFL**)
- Minkey (**Hockey**)
- NetSetGo (**Netball**)
- Cricket Blast (**Cricket**)
- Modcrosse (**Lacross**)



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Over training

Young athletes who focus on only one sport from an early age may miss out on benefits of participating in a variety of physical activities. Playing multiple sports help develop a wider range of motor skills, prevents overuse of the same muscles, and supports long-term enjoyment of being active.

Those who specialise early are often exposed to increased physical, physiological and psychological demands due to intensive training schedules and frequent competitions. These pressures can raise the risk of over-training and overuse injuries.

To reduce the risk of over-training injuries in young athletes¹:

- Encourage participation in more than one sport throughout childhood
- Ensure there are adequate rest days each week
- Avoid excessive training loads or year-round competition
- Monitor for signs of fatigue, stress, or declining enthusiasm
- Provide a balanced focus on fun, skill development and well-being



1. Sports Medicine Australia (n.d.). *Safety Guidelines for Children and Young People in Sport and Recreation*. Retrieved from: www.sma.org.au/resources/policies-and-guidelines/active-children/

2. SmartPlay (2021). *Safer Sport with New Children Guidelines*. Retrieved from SmartPlay Website: www.smartplay.com.au/safer-sport-with-new-children-guidelines/

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