



# Fall leisure and recreational fun

## Help kids choose extracurricular activities

While it's important for kids to embrace extracurricular activities, parents know it's not always easy helping kids find the right activity that allows them to grow outside the classroom while still focusing on their responsibilities inside it. In addition, kids' interests tend to change at the drop of a hat, so something they want to do today might bore them come tomorrow. To help kids choose and manage their extracurricular activities, consider the following tips.

- Emphasize that schoolwork must come first. Parents should emphasize that if schoolwork starts to suffer, participation in extracurricular activities will be put on hold until kids get their studies back on track.

- Get a grasp of the commitment required of a given activity. Extracurricular activities require various levels

of commitment. Parents and their children should consider the level of commitment an extracurricular requires and choose the activity they're most comfortable with.

- Don't overlook the social benefits of extracurricular activities. Consider those benefits when helping kids choose activities, especially if they're likely to choose solitary activities like learning a musical instrument. It's good to encourage such interests, but also try to encourage a balance between solitary activities and ones that encourage socialization with peers.

- Don't forget the fun factor. Extracurricular activities are not just supposed to instill character; they're also supposed to be fun. If kids aren't having fun or showing any interest in a given extracurricular activity, then help them find another one.

## Fall sports prep to avoid injuries

The dawn of a new school year is an exciting for school-aged youngsters. Though many kids may not look forward to homework or getting up early, a new school year is often exciting for young athletes who long to get back on the playing fields and compete with their team-mates.

As valuable and exciting as participating in team sports can be, they can just as easily prove dangerous for athletes who aren't prepared for the rigors of physical activity. Many a young athlete has pulled a hamstring or suffered a shin splint when returning to athletic competition after a long layoff. But such injuries are largely preventable, and the following tips can help school-aged athletes ensure their return to competition is as painless as it is pleasurable.

- Condition your muscles in the weeks heading

up to tryouts or the start of the school year. Adults should help you develop a conditioning program that gets the right muscle groups ready for the rigors of sports. A properly conditioned athlete has a much lesser risk of injury than one who is not. Your off-season conditioning program should begin slowly and gradually grow more challenging as you draw closer to the school year.

- Stretch, stretch, stretch. Always stretch your muscles before any strenuous activities, whether it's an off-season conditioning program or an in-season competition. Stretching significantly reduces your risk of injury and can improve your performance on the field.
- Get geared up. Though summer might seem tailor-made for flip-flops, such footwear

should never be worn when exercising and preparing for the coming sports season. Athletic shoes specific to your sport are made to provide the support you will need as you train and compete. As well, wear appropriate athletic attire to reduce the risk of injury.

- Weight train in the presence of coaches or parents. Many athletes begin weight training for the first time when they are in high school. Parents, trainers and coaches can explain the equipment to young athletes while ensuring they don't overdo it in the weight room. Lifting too much weight or having bad form when weightlifting can cause serious injury that can sideline youngsters for the coming season, if not longer.
- Don't try to match your fellow athletes. The human body de-

velops differently for everyone. Young athletes must recognize that there's a chance their classmates and team-mates may be developing more quickly than they are. These classmates may be more capable of performing certain physical activities. If you must endure substantial pain to perform a given exercise, then your body is likely telling you it simply isn't ready for that exercise. Don't force the body to do something just to keep up with your team-mates.

- Take a break. Even if you rested for most of summer, you still will need to rest when you begin getting ready for the upcoming athletic season. Take at least one day off per week to allow your body to recover and recharge. Your body needs that recovery time to reduce its risk of injury.

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