

Youth Sports Week

During Youth Sports Week, July 15-21, thousands of youth sports coaches and parents are showing their support with a focus on P.L.A.Y.S. ~ Physical activity, Living healthy, Access, Youth development, Safety. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service recommends starting this week off by listening to the needs and wants of the youth participants in order to strengthen the skills and bonds created by youth sports.

Youth sports participation has positive impacts on health, fitness, character development and other traits that contribute to success in school and adulthood. Erica Reyes, Extension Program Specialist with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service recommends that sports are a wonderful way for children to stay healthy, but most importantly, we need children to have activity that they enjoy and in which their bodies, muscles, and brains are used in a variety of ways.

In 2014, The International Olympic Committee (IOC) met to advance a more appropriate and optimal, evidence-informed approach to youth athlete development. The IOC guidelines include:

1. Consideration of individual and constantly changing rates of growth, maturation and development
2. Holistic and diverse development of the athlete and person
3. Individual and flexible frameworks of athlete development
4. Mitigating injury risk and promoting health through sport
5. Advocacy for a wider definition of athletic and sport success

These guidelines look at the total needs of the child. Each is different with their interests, physical development, ability, and maturation. Also important is making sure they follow healthy eating guidelines, keep hydrated, and get enough rest.

It is important to engage youth athletes in learning the importance of proper nutrition and hydration for maximum athletic performance and for general health and well-being. Proper nutrition is vital for youth athletes because they need extra nutrients to maintain and sustain performance and endurance. As the youth athlete takes in the proper nutrition before and after physical activity, they need to combine it with fluid intake before and during physical activity. The youth athlete may become dehydrated with the loss of water through sweating and breathing if the appropriate amount of fluids is not consumed. Without the proper amount of fluids, the body will not work to its full potential.

Key messages for proper nutrition include; make half your plate fruits and vegetables, switch to fat-free or low-fat milk, make at least half your grains whole grains, compare foods for choices lower in sodium, and drink water instead of sugary drinks.

Remember proper hydration before, during, and after practice or games. Make sure you watch for signs of dehydration which include; thirst, dry mouth, flushed skin, fatigue, headache, dizziness/weakness, high body temperature, and an increased breathing rate.

Lastly, in celebrating youth sports week this July, and youth sports in general, there should be a combination of healthy competitiveness, fun, family/team bonding, and safety!