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Scuba Fitness: When should young divers begin lifting weights?



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In an effort to grow the industry, dive certification agencies are dedicating entire magazine issues to inspiring kids to scuba dive. Programs to orient children to diving begin as early as seven years of age. While there is some controversy among industry experts about the best age and responsible participation, it appears children are entering the sport in greater numbers. Like adults, children need to be certified and fit to dive. The type of exercise appropriate for children is different than for adults. Changes in exercise protocol occur with age and individual health and physical development.

Question: When should young divers begin lifting weights?

Answer: Most studies recommend children can safely begin lifting weights at about 13 years of age. These studies are primarily concerned with proper skeletal development in children and state that it is very important not to lift HEAVY weights at a young age. However, in my experience, because each child grows differently, exercise with weights may begin at any age. Each child will develop strength, control and mental focus at their own pace. What is heavy weight for one child may be light

weight for another. There is considerable evidence that even competitive weight lifting is safe for a healthy well-trained child.

I've discovered when introducing weight training programs for children that muscle tone and strength develops well in advance of the body's ability to maximize it. When a child who weight lifts reaches puberty, their strength to weight ratio and sports performance ability dramatically improve in contrast to children who have not exercised with weights.

Who should decide whether a young diver lifts weights?

Whether a child lifts weights should be decided by the parents, not a coach or family friend. Like scuba diving for young divers, weight training for children should always be supervised and proper technique practiced over and over again.

One of the greatest benefits from weight lifting for children is an improvement in self confidence. Learning to control the body helps young divers feel good and prevents some of the awkwardness experienced during the growing years.

Scuba diving can be great motivation for exercise participation. Exercise sessions should be fun, educational and designed for the specific needs of each child. Young divers in particular benefit from exercise in the form of sports participation and games such as "Sharks and Minnows", a form of tag, that engages both the mind and body.

“ Dive theory, fish identification, swimming skills and more, can be incorporated into a fitness program to help young divers learn to dive, gain a better understanding of personal responsibility and participate more safely in the recreational activity of scuba diving.

Free weights such as dumbbells are a good choice for young divers because they provide for more functional exercises. Training should include body weight such as calisthenics and plyometrics combined with sessions of weight lifting. This helps develop strength, coordination and balance that transfer well into recreational activities.

