

Staying Healthy, Fit and Happy

# WELLNESS



## Stick With It

*How youth sports can lead to a lifetime of healthy habits.* BY ALLISON FORSYTH

SOME OF MY FONDEST CHILDHOOD MEMORIES are of picking up a tennis racket to hit a ball back and forth with my dad or kicking a soccer ball around the back yard with friends. I also did gymnastics and tennis growing up, and then went on to train in ballet. My drive, my work ethic, my discipline, my resilience—all things I learned from playing sports and training in ballet for most of my life. (CONTINUED)



## Never Too Late

Looking to get your kid or grandkid involved in sports this summer and fall? There's still time to register for the following camps.

### Bradenton Country Club Youth Tennis Camp

Learn the basics of tennis. Weekly sessions from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Ages 6-15. Tuition is \$225 for members, \$250 for nonmembers. Lunch and swimming included.

### Cardinal Mooney High School Boys and Girls Soccer Camps

Learn fundamental drills from Mooney soccer coach Juan Osorio. July 25-29, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Grades 3-8. Tuition \$150. (941) 371-4917.

### Lakewood Ranch Summer Golf Camp at the Country Club

PGA golf instruction including etiquette and rules of play. Through Aug. 5, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Ages 6-15. Tuition \$275 for members, \$325 for nonmembers. (941) 907-4710.

### Core SRQ Swim Camp

Become a better swimmer, July 11-29, 9 a.m. to noon. Grades K-8. \$145 for members, \$175 for nonmembers. (941) 955-8194.

### Nathan Benderson Park's Ultimate Camp

A mixture of archery, fishing and water adventures. July 25-29, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Ages 6-14. Call (941) 358-7275, ext. 5812, for tuition details.

### Nathan Benderson Park Water Adventure Camp

Sample kayaking, paddleboarding, rowing, sailing and canoeing. Aug. 1-5, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Ages 6-14. Call (941) 358-7275, ext. 5812, for tuition details.

### Nike Boys Basketball Camp

Out-of-Door Academy head coach BJ Ivey and former pro Mark Wade will teach campers the basics. July 25-29, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Ages 10-17. Tuition \$325. (800) 645-3226.

### Sarasota Youth Sailing Summer Camp

Try your hand at a sport popular in Sarasota. Through Aug. 5, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Ages 5-18. Tuition \$400. (941) 504-423



[ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 77 ]

But not everyone has such positive experiences with youth sports. While roughly 60 million American children between the ages of 6 and 18 participate in organized sports each year, 70 percent of kids have quit sports by the age of 13, according to the National Council of Youth Sports. Kids stop playing for all kinds of reasons, but most often because of ineffective or indifferent coaches, overbearing helicopter parents, financial obstacles or just because sports stop being fun.

That can cause health problems. Youth sports help kids avoid childhood obesity, which affects at least 14 million American kids. Obesity, in turn, can lead to brittle bones, joint pain and unhealthy hearts, among other complications. Getting the recommended 60 minutes of vigorous exercise per day, meanwhile, improves your heart health and lowers your blood pressure and your risk of diabetes, while improving the quality of your sleep and your cognitive skills, such as memory and focus.

Other research suggests that exercise can help control the emotional and physical feelings of stress. Complex mental health issues—like attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, depression and anxiety—can even be treated in part with exercise, on top of therapy and medication. Research has also found that physical education makes students more attentive and motivated in the classroom, and team sports can provide a safe, supportive

environment for children who might encounter violence, alcoholism or drug abuse at home.

Being active when young can also help create healthy habits for the rest of one's life.

"One huge goal is to create lifelong active people who have the self-esteem to work out," says Bradenton mental performance coach Amanda Myhrberg. Myhrberg was a collegiate volleyball player in her undergrad years and earned a master's degree in sport psychology from Florida State University. After working at IMG Academy for a few years, she launched A-Game Sport & Performance Consulting, where she helps young athletes reach their fullest mental potential.

"I have friends who feel intimidated by the gym as adults, because they'd never been exposed to exercise growing up," says Myhrberg. "They feel uncomfortable working out in groups and using gym equipment. Athletes and former athletes, on the other hand, know exactly what to do. They feel confident. Any movement early in life is going to help build that confidence."

By playing sports, children also learn how to deal with peers and authority figures while competing in healthy ways. This rings especially true for young girls.

"Sports teach girls to be assertive, use their voice and build a competitive spirit, a trait not typically encouraged in society," says Myhrberg. "It's actually been found that of all the Fortune 500 companies led by female CEOs, more than 90 percent participated in high school sports, and 52 percent played at a collegiate level."

Team sports add another layer of benefits. The pressure to perform is lessened when relying on teammates, and children learn how to communicate respectfully with one another, work together to solve problems, share responsibility and motivate and encourage one another toward a common goal.

So how do you keep children from quitting sports? According to Myhrberg, one main way is to reduce the risk of injuries.

"Overuse injuries are occurring in younger and younger populations,"



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[ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 78 ] says Myhrberg. “I’m seeing clients as young as 13 requiring things like Tommy John Surgery, also known as ulnar collateral ligament reconstruction, to repair their elbow.” Other common injuries include spinal fractures, knee ligament tears, ankle sprains and breaks and concussions from impact sports like football.

“These injuries happen because children these days are focusing too heavily on one sport,” says FC Sarasota soccer coach Kyle Lessig. FC Sarasota is one of the largest recreational and competitive soccer leagues in the county. Lessig often recommends children play other sports, too—a concept commonly referred to as sport sampling.

For example, a child who typically plays baseball can avoid overusing and injuring their arms by running for a track team during the offseason. It’s a strategy that is similar to cross training done by professional athletes. Think of football players taking ballet lessons to improve flexibility, or soccer players lifting weights.

Sport sampling can also reduce burnout, a state of emotional and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. Myhrberg says burnout occurs when children no longer feel the intrinsic joy a sport gave them in the first place.

“We encourage kids to take days off from practice when they begin to feel burnt out,” says Lessig. “We also don’t allow parents to watch competitive practice. This prevents sideline coaching from the parents and external pressure put on the kids.”

Parents who pressure young athletes can cause children to feel performance anxiety. It’s a common issue Myhrberg deals with as she helps clients with nonclinical anxiety and depression overcome their fears. She finds that individual sports harbor more performance anxiety, and that younger children tend to internalize losses and poor performance on a deeper level.

“They feel everything is their fault,” she says. “Depending on how the anxiety manifests, we’ll work on breathing exercises to do before a big game or competition, and mental thought-stopping and visualization techniques to help develop positive thinking.”

Bottom line: Sports should be fun.

“It’s become 10-year-olds taking it too seriously and their parents even more so,” says Myhrberg. She reminds athletes their sport should feel competitive, but mostly it should excite them. And coaches? They must be equipped to help athletes in sports, and in life. **S**

## SAFETY FIRST

Why your kids (or grandkids) should take swim lessons this summer. By Allison Forsyth

**S**wimming is a big part of summer fun, but it’s also a life-saving skill. Every year, about 900 children die from accidental drowning in the United States, and one major reason is a lack of access to swim lessons. Ken Diffenderfer, aquatic director at Core SRQ (formerly the Sarasota YMCA), recently offered us some tips on the importance of swim lessons and how to stay safe around the water this summer.

*“Drowning is a public health crisis—that’s the way I see it,” says Diffenderfer. “But drowning is avoidable.”*

### When should children begin swim lessons?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children start swimming lessons between ages 1 and 4. Diffenderfer says that by age 1, children can learn to float on their backs, breathe deeply and learn to submerge their heads un-

derwater. Kids should take two to three lessons per week and group classes are preferable to private lessons, so they can have fun with friends.

### What are some safety tips to remember around the pool?

“Always supervise your children when they are swimming,” says Diffenderfer. “If you are having a party, have a designated person always watch the kids and stay within arm’s length of the child.” Children should never swim alone or without adult permission.

### What are some beginner tricks children can learn in the water?

Never push your child into the water. Start slowly on ramps or steps and teach kids how to use the stepladder. Have them sit on the edge of a pool and place both hands to one side, twisting into the water. “Blow bubbles, and teach them to exhale through their nose,” says Diffenderfer. “Teach them in shallow water.”

### Should they use floating devices?

Diffenderfer says floating devices should not be used unless they are U.S. Coast Guard certified, and they are not a replacement for learning to swim.

### Where can children take lessons?

Core SRQ will host swimming camps throughout the summer. Visit [coresrq.org](http://coresrq.org) to register. Core SRQ is located at 1075 S. Euclid Ave., Sarasota, and 8301 Potter Park Drive, Sarasota.



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