



# Keeping Young Athletes in Shape from Home

**With practice and play on hold, kids can still stay fit for their sport of choice**

**By Christina Elston**

**W**e're all suffering to some degree from being sidelined as the pandemic drags on. But for young athletes, being kept off the field and away from teammates and coaches is only part of the equation. Some are looking at their sport of choice as a pathway to a possible college scholarship or professional career.

Whether your kids are dreaming of the big league or just the joy of the game, [Natasha Trentacosta, M.D.](#), sports medicine specialist at [Cedars-Sinai Kerlan-Jobe Institute](#), says they can absolutely stay active, conditioned and ready to return to play. "Youth and adolescent athletes can use this time as an opportunity to work on their conditioning and skills for a great comeback," she says.

The key is creating and sticking to a conditioning routine that incorporates cardiovascular movements, weight and strength training and core stability. Trentacosta says she has noticed several teams

and coaches providing athletes with virtual workouts or emailed weekly plans to help them keep up with their training from home. Parents could also search online for activities that apply to their child's specific sport.

Whether the workout comes from a coach or a parent's research, parents should make sure their young athlete is doing it safely. "In general, start slow and gradually build up within an exercise program," says Trentacosta. "Resist the urge to go hard right out of the gate." She also advises athletes to warm up before every exercise session and to stay flexible with a stretching routine, "especially during adolescent growth spurts where joints are getting tighter as they grow so quickly."

Activities need not be tied to the athlete's sport of choice to be of benefit. "Cross training is so good for athletes of all ages to help with fitness and avoid injuries," Trentacosta says. "If you are mainly



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Natasha Trentacosta, M.D.

an upper extremity athlete like volleyball, adding cycling in your routine is great for the lower extremities, which may get neglected otherwise." She points out that most kids have bikes already, and that there are plenty of other affordable ways to work out at home. "Things around the house can substitute as weights

to avoid expensive home weights," she says. "There are other affordable equipment options like jump ropes, which can provide a great overall body workout."

Guidelines about whether teams can safely practice or work out together change with pandemic conditions. When practice is taking place in person, Trentacosta stresses the importance of taking all recommended COVID-19 safety precautions. She also points out that camaraderie is a key component of sports participation. "Try to stay in touch with teammates as best as possible through phone or internet and coordinate workouts together this way, if possible," she suggests. "You can still have a workout buddy even if they are miles away. Workout buddies cannot only help the mental and social well-being but also help hold each other accountable for completing the tasks."

Younger children might also be happy working out with the built-in team living right there at home. "Parents can make physical activity fun while simultaneously working on skills specific to their child's sport and their mental game," Trentacosta says. "For example, if your child plays basketball, have a playful challenge to bring in that competitive mental game. Perhaps play a game of horse or, for soccer, have a shootout in the backyard or at a park."

Experienced middle-school and high-school athletes will likely have an easier time because they are used to the discipline required of their sport. For them, the key is focusing on their goal of earning an athletic scholarship or playing in college. "It's not uncommon for coaches to have had previous games recorded, so I recommend asking to watch old game [videos]," says Trentacosta. "With professional sports back on TV, athletes can record the game themselves and study it to gain pointers."

Athletes can monitor their progress during this time by setting simple goals for themselves. "With weight training, they should be seeing and monitoring an increase in the amount of weight they are lifting," Trentacosta says. "If they are doing a running program, their distance and or speed should be increasing over time." Trentacosta reminds parents, however, that the most important thing for young athletes - especially right now - is to have fun staying in shape. ♦

Christina Elston is editor of L.A. Parent.



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