Committee on the Pediatric Aspects of Physical Fitness, Recreation, and Sports

Participation in Sports by Girls

Until recently, girls and women have been deprived of their rightful share in physical recreation and sports by traditional concepts about a socially acceptable feminine image, misconceptions about the extent to which females may safely participate in strenuous activity, and, in fact, society's whole previous notion about woman's role and her basic needs and her physical capabilities.

Customary safeguards for protection of health and safety of males in sports and competitive athletics should apply to girls and women. Thus, competent medical care before, during, and after participation, rigorous conditioning, suitable high-quality equipment, good playing facilities, competent coaching, and capable officiating are necessary for the safety of all who engage in sports and competitive athletics.

To assist physicians who may be involved in making decisions regarding participation in sports by girls and young women, the Committee offers the following guidelines:

1. There is no reason to separate prepubescent children by sex in sports, physical education, and recreational activities.

2. Girls can compete against girls in any sports activity if matched for size, weight, skill, and physical maturation as long as the safeguards mentioned above are followed.

3. Girls can attain high levels of physical fitness through strenuous conditioning activities to improve their physical fitness, agility, strength, appearance, endurance, and sense of psychic well-being. These have no unfavorable influence on menstruation, future pregnancy, and childbirth.¹

4. Postpubescent girls should not participate against boys in heavy collision sports because of the grave risk of serious injury due to their lesser muscle mass per unit of body weight.

5. The talented female athlete may participate on a team with boys in an appropriate sport provided that the school or community offers opportunities for all girls to participate in comparable activities.

The best interests of girls and women in sports activities are served by opportunities to experience the thrill of sports competition when they are able to qualify for girls' programs sponsored just for them. Ultimate benefits are greater when efforts are directed to developing girls' programs and the athletes within them, rather than emphasizing the exceptional female athlete who may wish to participate with boys on their teams.

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