

Benefits of Soccer for Your Child – the Science

Fitness Gains:

The health benefits of engaging in regular physical activity are widely known: enhanced cardio respiratory fitness, increased muscular strength and endurance. The World Health Organization recommends that children and youths participate in moderate or vigorous physical activity at least four times per week. Participation in some sports meet this recommendation, whereas other do not. Soccer in particular requires extensive physical effort over an extended period of time and confers greater health benefits than other sports that consist of a lot of down time. Research has shown that the heart rate of young soccer players during small-sided games was above 80% of their maximum heart rate for the entire training session. This is due to the repeated bouts of intense effort (Randers *et al.* 2010).



Character Development:

Soccer as a team sport is an important arena for peer interaction and provides a vehicle for learning to cooperate with team-mates, negotiate and offer solutions to challenges, develop self-control, display courage and commitment, and learn such values as fairness, loyalty, persistence and teamwork (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995).

Bone Density:

Research has shown that participation in soccer in childhood is related to improved bone health later in life (Tenforde and Fredericson, 2011). The multidirectional, high-impact forces that are experienced in soccer lead to higher bone mineral composition, higher bone mineral density and enhanced bone geometry. **This is particularly important for girls.**



Movement and Perceptual Skills:

Movement skills in soccer, with the multitude of movement combinations that are required within a game e.g. sprinting, jumping, back pedalling, side-shuffling, deceleration, acceleration, kicking and throwing, equips a child with a rich movement repertoire that enables him/her to develop coordination and confidence in all walks of life. Furthermore, the requirement to use these movements in the right place at the right time i.e. in anticipating or reacting to the unpredictable dynamics of team-mates, opponents and the ball, enables the child to develop the ability to read and react to important environmental cues. These types of perceptual skills in soccer have been shown to be related to memory recall in youth soccer players (Williams *et al.* 2012).

