



Benefits of Youth Sports

Developed by the PCSFN Science Board

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The National Youth Sports Strategy aims to unite U.S. youth sports culture around a shared vision: that one day, all youth will have the opportunity, motivation, and access to play sports—regardless of their race, ethnicity, sex, ability, or ZIP code. Why youth sports? Research shows that participating in youth sports can lead to immediate and long-term benefits for youth, their families, and communities.

Mental, Emotional, and Social Health

73 percent of parents believe that sports benefit their child's mental health.¹ And they are right!

- Participating in sports is associated with:
 - Lower rates of anxiety and depression²⁻⁵
 - Lower amounts of stress^{5,6}
 - Higher self-esteem and confidence^{3,7-9}
 - Reduced risk of suicide^{5,10,11}
 - Less substance abuse and fewer risky behaviors^{5,8,12}
 - Increased cognitive performance^{5,13-15}
 - Increased creativity¹⁶
 - Greater enjoyment of all forms of physical activity¹⁷
 - Improved psychological and emotional well-being for individuals with disabilities¹⁸
 - Increased life satisfaction^{19,20}

Physical Health

88 percent of parents believe that sports benefit their child's physical health.¹ Indeed, participation is one way for youth to get the physical activity they need to be fit and healthy.

- Participating in physical activity is associated with:
 - Improved bone health²¹
 - Improved weight status^{5,21}
 - Increased cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness^{5,21}
 - Reduced risk of cancer and diabetes^{22,23}
- Participating in sports is associated with:
 - Increased physical activity levels²⁴
 - Improved cardiovascular fitness²⁴
 - Decreased body fat percentage for girls²⁴
 - Increased overall quality of life^{19,20}

Educational and Career Success

55 percent of parents believe that sports will benefit their children academically and improve their future careers. 80 percent of parents believe that sports helped their child learn about discipline and dedication, as well as how to get along with others.¹ Research supports these beliefs.

- Participating in sports is associated with:
 - Improved teamwork, social skills, and social responsibility^{3,9}
 - Improved life skills (e.g., goal setting, time management, work ethic, empathy, negotiation)^{9,25,26}
 - Increased empowerment, personal responsibility, and self-control^{9,27}
 - Improved educational and occupational skills (e.g., determination, perseverance, grit, resilience, critical thinking)⁹
 - Higher levels of academic achievement^{5,28–34}
 - Greater leadership qualities^{5,35–37}
- High school athletes are more likely to attend and graduate from a four-year college^{10,33,38–41}

Lifelong Participation

73 percent of adults who play sports participated when they were younger.¹ This means they built the habit of physical activity early and are reaping the rewards in adulthood.

- Lifelong participation in sports can lead to improved mental health outcomes.^{6,42}
- Over 50% of adults who participate in sports believe that participation reduces stress and improves mental health.¹
- Adolescents who play sports are 8 times more likely to be physically active at age 24 than those who do not play sports.⁴³
- Participating in sports leads to immediate psychological benefits, and these can continue even after retirement from sports.⁴⁴



Economic and Community Impact

The benefits of youth sports extend beyond the field and even beyond the participant.

- Participating in sports and physical activity can lead to:
 - A decrease in direct, indirect, and personal health care costs (collectively, up to \$28 billion per year)^{45–47}
 - A stronger long-term labor market^{48,49}

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