

Sports Participation

What is sports participation?



Participation in sport does not have to be exclusive to organised sports and sporting clubs although this is often a way of ensuring regular participation occurs as you are accountable to others when you do or don't participate. Organised sports often require some form of associated fees and travel requirements as well as specified time commitments. It is for these reasons that it can be difficult for some people and families to commit. Other non-organised sports options to participate in may be cycling, hiking, swimming or social engagements that may include sports such as tennis or cricket just to name a few options.

Why is sports participation important?

Involvement in sports or regular physical activity provides both direct and

indirect benefits. Some of these benefits include:

- Understanding and developing teamwork
- Sportsmanship
- Learning positive management of winning and losing
- Improved physical strength and endurance
- Reduced risk of cardiovascular disease
- Reduced risk of obesity
- Healthy growth of bones, muscles, ligaments and tendons
- Improved coordination and balance
- If outside, kids get some vitamins from sunshine
- Helps with self regulation of physical activity levels
- Social skills opportunity with a consistent group of peers
- Provides opportunity to develop a greater self esteem with people who share an interest
- Sporting clubs are positive environments and provide a sense of community

What are the building blocks necessary to develop participation in sport?

- **Self regulation:** The ability to obtain, maintain and change one's emotion, behaviour, attention and activity level appropriate for a task or situation in a socially acceptable manner.
- **Muscular strength:** An ability to exert force against resistance.
- **Muscular endurance:** Ability of a muscle or group of muscles to exert force repeatedly against resistance.
- **Balance:** The ability to maintain position whether that is static, dynamic (moving) or rotational.
- **Coordination:** Ability to integrate multiple movements into efficient movement.
- **Receptive (understanding) language:** Comprehension.
- **Self confidence:** The child's belief in their ability to perform a task.

How can you tell if my child has problems with

participation in sport?

If a child has difficulties participating in sport they might:

- Be unfamiliar with a variety of sports.
- Lack hand eye coordination.
- Struggles to display appropriate behaviour when they 'lose' a game.
- Avoid outside play.
- Display anxiety in of avoidance of PE (physical education) classes.
- Fail to meet gross motor milestones.
- Have poor endurance for physical activities.
- Prefer to play with electronics.
- Not persist with physical challenges.
- Find it difficult to follow verbal instructions in large groups.

What other problems can occur when a child has sports participation difficulties?

When a child has sports participation difficulties, they might also have difficulties with:

- **Strength:** An ability to exert force against resistance.
- **Endurance:** The ability of a muscle or group of muscles to exert force repeatedly against resistance.
- **Balance:** The ability to maintain position whether that is static, dynamic (moving) or rotational.
- **Coordination:** The ability to integrate multiple movements into efficient movement.
- **Postural control** for table top tasks involves the ability to stabilize the trunk and neck to enable coordination of other limbs when sitting at the table.
- **Fatigue** related to writing and drawing
- **Planning and sequencing:** The sequential multi-step task/activity performance to achieve a well-defined result.
- **Following instructions:** Correctly doing what is requested verbally or visually in a timely manner.
- **Low muscle tone:** Muscles that have low tension or resistance so that they look "floppy"

What can be done to improve participation in sport?

- **Lead by example:** Be physically active yourself as a parent/carer.
- **Family activities:** Make sure that some family outings offer opportunities for physical activity, such as playing sport together.
- **Drive less:** Encourage your child to walk or ride their bicycle for short trips, rather than rely on you to drive them.
- **Support** your child's efforts in sport. Make sure you're there at each match, cheering them on from the sidelines.
- **Limit sedentary activity:** Set time limits on sedentary activities like computer games and television.
- **Team approach:** Consult with your child's school or preschool on ways to encourage greater participation in sports and physical activity.

What activities can help improve participation in sport?

- **Practice:** Isolated home practice of specific skills where there is less pressure to 'perform' allowing more relaxed practice for mastery sake.
- **Break down tasks** into small steps and guide the child verbally and physically through the skill.
- **Wheelbarrow walking** or animal walks to develop strength and endurance.
- **Family participation** in fun runs or other charity events.
- **Individual sports** can be a good place to start as there is often less competitiveness, which will mean less anxiety if the child is unsuccessful first time.
- **Trampoline:** This is a good informal activity that can be done at home, to build up postural strength and control as well as coordination.
- **Bike riding** is a good non competitive activity that the whole family can be involved in.

Why should I seek therapy if I notice difficulties with participation in sport in my child?

Therapeutic intervention to help a child with sports participation difficulties is

important to:

- Help develop activity levels in young children as evidence suggests that active children are more likely to be active adults, resulting in a healthier and longer lasting life.
- Physical Education (P.E.) is a part of the school curriculum where participation is compulsory and can be a source of anxiety for children with limited sports participation.
- Many childhood friendships are consolidated when children share common experiences and spend time together on a regular basis and participation in sport is the perfect medium for this to occur.
- Sporting activities give the opportunity for social skill practice, core muscle (posture) and endurance strengthening, coordination and body movement planning development.

If left untreated what can difficulties with sports participation lead to?

- An **increased risk** of many health related issues such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and many other conditions.
- **Academic under-performance** due to not being able to sustain an upright posture at the table for writing.
- **Social isolation** as they may struggle to participate in social activities such as going ice skating, riding, social hit of tennis, beach volleyball or other various peer social activities.
- **Poor lifestyle choices** are likely to be cyclic and be passed on to following generations.

What type of therapy is recommended for sports participation difficulties?

If your child has difficulties with participation in sport, it is recommended they consult an Occupational Therapist.

Contact us today to make an initial enquiry or book an assessment for your child
on 1800 KID SENSE (1800 543 736)

