

Why Aussie kids need organised sport

August 1 2016, by Cris Burne, Sciencenetwork Wa



Credit: Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels

Girls who don't play organised sport early will probably never play—and they'll miss out on health benefits that go with it.

This is the finding from research linked to WA's Raine Study, which tracks the health of more than 2000 [children](#) born between 1989 and

1991.

Curtin University's Dr Erin Howie used Raine Study data from ages 5, 8, 10, 12, 14 and 17—and self-assessments at age 20—to analyse the way childhood [sports participation](#) affected future sports participation.

She found kids either:

1. played early and continued to [play](#) (47.5% for [girls](#); 55% for boys),
2. played early, then dropped out (34% for girls; 37% for boys),
3. never played (18%, girls only), or
4. joined later in adolescence (8%, boys only).

Dr Howie's findings linked sports participation in boys and girls with increased lean body mass, a measure associated with reduced mortality.

Previous research also suggests playing sport improves fitness, diet and mental health.

But a third of Aussie kids aged 5–14 don't play sport.

"There's benefits in early and sustained sports participation for both girls and boys," says Dr Howie.

"It's important to start girls in sport early. If you don't, they're probably never going to participate."

Interestingly, they found girls who played sport had better lean body mass than girls who never played, even if they'd dropped out years earlier but the same didn't hold true for boys.

This activity seemed to protect girls who played sport early in life, says

Dr Howie.

"But I hate soccer!"

So what if your kid just doesn't want to play?

"It's really about giving them options," says Dr Howie. "You want them to be physically active, but you don't want to be forcing them to do something they don't like."

She recommends talking to your kids about why they don't want to play.

"You want to help them realise why they don't like it, how they can make it better, and help them understand the benefits, help them to find something they do like."

Kids who choose to play sport have more fun, so let them choose, says Dr Howie.

"It's like eating vegetables: You don't have to eat carrots. You can eat carrots, broccoli or celery. But you have to eat vegetables."

"It's also about creating positive sporting experiences," she says. "Sport's not about winning all the time, but about making progress, setting goals, and overall having a better experience with sport."

More information: ERIN K. HOWIE et al. Organized Sport Trajectories from Childhood to Adolescence and Health Associations, *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* (2016). [DOI: 10.1249/MSS.0000000000000894](https://doi.org/10.1249/MSS.0000000000000894)

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