

# Why kids should be encouraged to play more than one sport

May 28 2019, by Nicole Graham

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Giving kids a chance to try different sports from an early age will help them develop into well-rounded, confident and capable athletes, according to a U of A youth development expert. Credit: U of A Athletics

While many parents are heeding the advice of experts and resisting the urge to have their kids focus exclusively on one sport too early in life, a University of Alberta professor who specializes in youth development is advising parents to keep their children's activities in balance.

"It's about leaving room for children to enjoy childhood," explained Nick Holt.

"Parents are understanding the benefits of youth participation in multiple sports and activities, such as building a solid foundation of movement skills. However, some are taking it too far, and this can be just as detrimental as early specialization for the young athlete," he said.

The risks of overscheduling too many activities are similar to specializing in one sport: burnout, injury and eventual dropout are often the outcome.

"The added pressure of managing a number of activities, especially as the kids age and responsibilities increase, can increase stress and anxiety levels in kids," he said.

## **Right balance**

"Multi-sport athlete" is a term that has been growing in popularity in mainstream media over the past several years. From Wayne Gretzky's "Message to Parents" in *The Globe and Mail* to "The Steph Curry Approach to Youth Sports" in *The Wall Street Journal*, the message is very clear: encouraging your kids to participate in multiple sports from an early age will help develop a more well-rounded, confident and capable athlete.

Holt said the recent emphasis on multi-sport involvement comes at a time when parents are overly concerned with early specialization of their young children.

Stories of parents who fill up their 10-year-old hockey player's schedule with year-round hockey as well as dry-land training and power skating have become common and are cause for concern, said Holt, who added

the research shows the singular focus on one sport not only leads to higher dropout rates, but is also associated with an increase in the risk of injury.

"Putting your kids in different sports exposes them to a variety of movement scenarios. Swimming is very different from soccer, and soccer is very different from curling," said Holt. "By sampling different types of sport, youth are building a good foundation of movement skills, which will help them as an athlete and should keep them physically active later in life.

"But, again, you don't want to overdo it."

The solution to this swinging pendulum of variety is balance, which sounds simple enough, but is often hidden in plain sight.

## **Sampling sports**

According to Holt, sport camps are a great way for youth to reap the benefits of sport sampling. Multi-sport camps, in particular, are ideal for helping to find that balance, especially for children aged 10 and younger.

"They are exposed to many sports while gaining different movement experiences and sport skills and finding out what really interests them—what they really enjoy."

He added that because camps are often a short time commitment and take place throughout the summer months, the risk of overscheduling your kids and increasing anxiety levels significantly decreases.

Last but not least, Holt also suggests [parents](#) carve out time for a childhood rite of passage—[free play](#).

"Free-play and family activities are just as important in developing confident, well-rounded individuals as sport participation," he said.  
"When all are taken into account, kids will benefit personally, socially and physically, and it will set the stage for a physically active lifestyle."

Provided by University of Alberta

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