

The sport you choose



Keep children with MS active in a sport they will enjoy.

by **Nathan Solheim**

Research shows that exercise can improve function and quality of life in people with MS. “We should keep our kids active in something they enjoy,” says Dr. Jayne Ness, a pediatric neurologist at Children’s Hospital of Alabama in Birmingham. “Kids have better outcomes when they’re active. They feel better.”

“I ask children and teenagers, ‘What sport do you like?’” says Sue Bennett, EdD, PT, clinical associate professor in the Department of Rehabilitation Science at The State University of New York at Buffalo. “Just like with adults, the goal in rehabilitation and wellness is to find an activity people enjoy so they do it regularly enough to get the benefits.”

Dr. Bennett thinks swimming is a great choice for kids with MS because the sport has low impact on joints, and helps muscle and respiratory control. Popular team sports such as baseball aren’t out of bounds either and can provide kids with valuable experience in working as part of a team toward a common goal, not to mention the social benefits of interacting with peers who have similar interests.

No matter which sport they choose, kids with MS should stay hydrated and wear loose-fitting clothing and caps to properly cool, Dr. Bennett says. Both kids and parents should watch for symptoms such as visual impairment, numbness, fatigue or loss of balance, which could affect how the child participates in different sports. While it’s up to the family to disclose a child’s diagnosis, Dr. Bennett says coaches or medical staff can help monitor players for overheating or other symptoms and adjust participation accordingly.

“Listen to what your body is telling you,” says Joe Gieck, EdD, former director of sports medicine and professor of clinical orthopedic surgery at the University of Virginia. “If you can be competitive that’s all well and good, but the main thing is to maintain physical health throughout your life.”

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