

Aloha Everyone!

Just a short note before you read on. The following two articles talk about the benefits of age group swimming. At the recent World Coaches Clinic there was a consensus in the importance of developing well rounded athletes at the age group level, conscious of the lifetime benefits of committing to exercise by means of athletics or sports. In our case we offer swimming as the vehicle for your childrens' health benefit. Please take the time to discuss with your children the importance of nutrition, proper rest, and regular exercise. Encourage them by getting them to practice on a timely and regular manner, and perhaps too, by starting to swim yourselves for the sake of your health. Much aloha and Mahalo for reading on!!!

Coach Harry

Lifetime Fitness

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Growing recognition that many American children are neither developing sufficient fitness, nor learning appropriate lifetime health habits has caused leading physical educators to re-evaluate their long-time methods and shed the traditional coach/drill sergeant image for an educational approach that gives young students the tools for lifetime fitness. Ron Feingold, Ph.D. of Adelphi University in N.Y., and one of the leaders in this movement explains.

"To me what's relevant is what they learn about fitness, and how do they feel about physical activity," Feingold says. "The goal should be to get them to enjoy fitness and physical activities and to understand their benefits."

Accordingly, progressive P.E. teachers are exchanging their former emphasis on teaching competitive sports skills and administering competitive fitness tests for an approach that encourages students to adopt "appropriate lifelong exercise behavior," and a healthy appreciation for physical activity. The proverbial "ounce of prevention" will help children improve their long term health prospects by developing healthy lifestyle habits from an early age.

The new priority is that kids should know how their bodies work after they've had 12 years of physical education. As one teacher said: "It's more important that they understand how to develop strength and cardiovascular fitness, how to train safely, and have a basic understanding of what happens when you move, than that they know how to shoot a basketball."

The changing focus of thinking about youth fitness is also leading to a re-examination of fitness testing methods. Such competitive tests as the Presidential Physical Fitness Test tended to discourage those children who needed help the most. Kids who performed poorly were embarrassed both by taking the fitness test and by their results, while better athletes were rewarded for their performances.

That test has now been adjusted to make it an educational process and to focus on personal improvement rather than performance level with rewards and recognition to those making progress from previous tests. "We want kids to buy into the idea that it's the activity that's important and the performance score is secondary," says Dr. Marilu Meredith, director of youth fitness programs for the Institute of Aerobics Research. "If we can impart an activity habit - and keep it fun - they'll stay active and they will be fit."

What actions can both parents and age group coaches take to import these ideas into age group swimming?

1) Consciously communicate to kids the importance of aerobic fitness and "healthy hearts" by raising their level of awareness of swimming's aerobic benefits.

- 2) Be more conscious of the importance of your own role modeling in maintaining good health through personal fitness programs.
- 3) Balance emphasis on achievement and performance for age groupers with emphasis on the simple values of participation for the long term and communicate swimming as simply the first step in a lifelong fitness habit.
- 4) Tie in the value of good nutritional habits, not simply for better performance, but for health's sake.

If we adopt a health-related outlook for age group swimming we'll be giving the kids in our programs a form of lifelong health insurance that can't be purchased at any cost.

Swimming Is An Investment

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With time at a premium in the two-career family, many parents are now asking "Is it the sacrifice and expense of joining an age group program worth it?" Here are some thoughts on why it is from Coach Cindy Anderson, head age group coach of the Reno Aquatic Club in Reno, Nevada.

"Age group swimming is much more than just swimming back and forth, day in and day out - the occasional swim meet and winning ribbon. Of course the swimmer gains from the physical activity of swimming, by becoming more fit...and there is involvement in an after-school activity at a time when working parents can't be with their kids. But age group swimming is an investment in the health, fitness, and overall growth and development of the youngster.

From the physical standpoint, swimming helps improve cardiovascular fitness, strength, flexibility, and neuromuscular coordination. In addition, swimming is a lifelong fitness activity that is relatively easy to pursue, low in injury risk, and helps reduce stress. It can be enjoyed recreationally long after it has ceased competitively.

Beyond the physical benefits, swimming in both practice and meets contributes greatly to the psychological and emotional development of the young athlete. As an activity, swimming requires the development of specific and complex motor patterns. Swimming well requires not only hard physical work, but also intelligent application of learned skills and the ability to THINK while performing. From concentration on performing stroke skills correctly to executing race strategies, the athlete learns early to concentrate and perform under pressure. In addition nutrition education is an ongoing and essential part of the athlete's overall development and success.

Age group swimming also requires consistent dedication, discipline and long-term commitment to goals, learning the habit of persistent application of lifestyle adaptations for goal achievement. Young swimmers also learn to accept success and failure with equal grace. In life as in swimming, one often fails several times on the way to a success, and it is an essential and difficult life-lesson to learn. The ups and downs of competition and training expose the young athlete to the realities of success and failure and force them to deal with the living experience.

Age group swimming, both directly and indirectly, teaches the athlete to develop: goal-setting strategies, time management skills, relaxation and imagery techniques, positive attitudes, and generally enhances the athletes overall self-image. Competitive swimming is both social and fun, and by virtue of the athletic nature of the activity, reinforces positive social values and beliefs. Athletes are taught to value their hard work in training and steer clear of drug and alcohol abuses.

To be an athlete is a very special and wonderful thing. To be a competitive swimmer is special, wonderful, and difficult; but the benefits of the persistent dedication and application of efforts, along with the benefits of facing and dealing with the emotional and psychological experiences associated with the demands of training and competing for success, are well worth whatever personal and/or financial investments are required. Age group swimming is much more than it first appears.