

# **The Benefits and Dangers of Youth Ice Hockey**

by Mindy James

Many parents encourage their children to play team sports because of the physical, psychological, and social benefits. However, contact sports such as ice hockey have come under close scrutiny over the last several years as awareness of the short and long term effects of injuries has increased. Despite these potential dangers, enrollment in youth ice hockey has increased steadily over the past 5 years.

Youth team sports support kids being healthy physically and mentally through learning how to build strong relationships. A focus on physical activity can help reduce childhood obesity rates which have doubled over the past 40 years ("Benefits of Youth Sports"). Also, recent studies have found adults who played team sports in youth have better mental health due to having better exercise habits and improved social skills ("Research: Team Sports"). Playing team sports not only helps kids get fit, the activity helps establish lifelong healthy habits benefiting the body, mind, and social skills of participants.

These benefits may come at a cost to players. According to Boston Children's Hospital Sports Medicine, the most common injuries to youth ice hockey players include concussions, shoulder separations, wrist fractures, pulled back muscles, hip inflammation, and knee sprains and tears. However, the past 15 years has seen a decrease in injuries due to improved safety equipment and stricter game rules ("Injury Prevention Series-Ice Hockey"). While there are risks of injury in ice hockey, the severity and frequency have been lowered in recent years.

Perhaps it is the benefits of team sports coupled with the declining numbers of severe injuries that are encouraging parents to allow their sons and daughters to put on sharp steel blades to speed across ice at record numbers.

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