

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Martial arts a great form of exercise for kids when done safely

Whether they like to imitate Kung Fu Panda and the Karate Kid or need a fun way to exercise, children are taking a strong interest in martial arts.

The sport can be a good choice for kids who want to get stronger and more flexible. Martial arts also improve a child's attitude, self-esteem, self-respect and self-awareness, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Before signing your child up for classes, learn about the different styles of martial arts, their safety and consider your child's age.

All martial arts require people to learn repetitive practices. Students earn colored belts after passing skill tests. Only some move on to compete.

Popular forms include karate, taekwondo, judo, muay Thai kickboxing, mixed martial arts, kung fu, Brazilian ju-jitsu and pankration.

Some martial arts forms and techniques do not require the person to hit or touch another object or person. Others involve fighting between two people. Called sparring, it includes blocking, kicking, striking and takedowns. There is no set age when kids are old enough to spar. Children should learn basic forms first, according to the AAP.

As with any sport, children can be injured by martial arts. The most common injuries include cuts, scrapes, sprains and strains. Concussions are common in competitive martial arts, especially if strikes and kicks to the head are allowed.

To block injury, the AAP advises parents to:

- Delay contact martial arts and competition until their child can follow non-contact forms and techniques.
- Remember that headgear and mouthguards are not proven to protect kids from concussions, though mouthguards reduce injuries to the face and mouth.
- Check that their child's program works on blocking skills and safety education and follows competition rules to help prevent concussions.
- Avoid overtraining by setting a time limit on your child's martial arts training. Children who train less than three hours per week are less prone to injury.
- Make sure children understand that mixed martial arts moves and techniques can be dangerous. Children should not copy them.

For information about kids and martial arts, visit <http://bit.ly/2ftgQP5>.

— Trisha Koriath