

## Committee on Sports Medicine

# Infant Exercise Programs

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Infant exercise programs are becoming abundant in the United States. In most programs, massage techniques, passive exercises, and holding an infant in various positions are used. Some programs involve the purchase of "exercise equipment." Promoters have claimed that participation by an infant in these programs will improve physical prowess.

In early infancy, the predominant neuromuscular responses are reflex in nature.<sup>1</sup> Most activity at this age can be attributed to an intrinsic arousal-seeking drive. Natural curiosity and the drive toward self-sufficiency motivate infants in virtually all activities.<sup>2</sup>

Providing a stimulating environment for an infant's development is extremely important. Environmental deprivation will impede the developmental progress of an infant. There is some evidence that conditioned responses can be elicited in the newborn period. However, there have been no data to suggest that structured programs or the promotion of conditioned responses will advance skills or provide any long-term benefit to normal infants.<sup>3</sup>

The bones of infants are more susceptible to trauma than those of older children and adults. The skeletal system of the child in the first year of life is less than optimally ossified.<sup>4</sup> Infants do not have the strength or reflexes necessary to protect themselves from external forces. The possibility exists that adults may inadvertently exceed the infant's physical limitations by using structured exercise programs.

Parents do not need specialized skills or equipment to provide an environment for the optimum

development of their infant. An infant should be provided with opportunities for touching, holding, face-to-face contact, and minimally structured playing with safe toys. If these opportunities occur, an infant's intrinsic motivation will guide his or her individual developmental course.

Therefore, the AAP recommends that (1) structured infant exercise programs not be promoted as being therapeutically beneficial for the development of healthy infants and (2) parents be encouraged to provide a safe, nurturing, and minimally structured play environment for their infant.

### COMMITTEE ON SPORTS MEDICINE, 1986-1988

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This statement has been approved by the Council on Child and Adolescent Health.

The recommendations in this statement do not indicate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed. Variations, taking into account individual circumstances, may be appropriate.

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