

Active Children

Warm ups, cool downs and stretching: the why, what and the how.

A physical activity session, whether that be of a competitive nature or training based, should be well structured to minimise injury and illness and consist of a warm up, skill practice, activity and cool down (Sports Medicine Australia, 2009). A warm up gives the child an opportunity to mentally and physically prepare, while gradually increasing their heart rate and breathing rate. It should aim to reach the intensity level of the sport by the end of the warm up phase, and mimic the movement patterns of the sport. An example of this might be performing leg kicks throughout the warm up in order to prepare for a football game.

Cool downs should be performed to complete the physical activity session, consisting of a low intensity cardiovascular activity for up to 5 minutes such as walking or jogging, followed by 5 minutes of gentle, dynamic stretching. It has been shown in research that particularly in young sportspeople, dynamic stretching; where the body part is moved slowly through a full stretch, is more effective than the traditional static 'hold' stretch. It should involve all the muscles that were used in the session and work through their full range of movement in order to improve flexibility.

Quick fact: Injury is a major barrier to participation, and it has been estimated that 50% of injuries are preventable! (SMA, 2009).

Ensure training is well structured through a warm up, cool down and stretching component to give our children the best chance to stay active!