

Get in the Game

How children with cochlear implants can benefit from playing sports

By Tiffani Hill-Patterson

When my daughter hit her first home run during softball last year, I was so proud and excited.

And I was thrilled that thanks to her bilateral cochlear implants, she could hear me, her teammates and the rest of the crowd cheering, whistling and stomping the bleachers.

Playing sports enriches my daughter's language and social skills and gives her confidence, important if your child feels "different" from other kids. Sports can do the same for your child with hearing loss. But as a parent, you're probably worried about whether it's worth the risk of injury. If you follow the safety rules and keep a constant check on the equipment, sports can be a wonderful and fun addition to your child's life.

"I think sports are great for kids – parents just have to use common sense on which sports they feel are safe for their child," says Audie Woolley, M.D., otolaryngologist at Children's Hospital in Birmingham, Ala. "Any sport is good, as long as the implant is not subjected to direct trauma. The device is still fragile, and a direct blow to the implant can damage it."

Of course, regardless of hearing ability, all children should be protected from a blow to the head. Make sure your child always wears his or her helmet when playing sports that require them, such as baseball, football, biking or rollerblading.

Get Moving

One big benefit – sports get children moving. With obesity rates on the rise in the United States, your child's health

depends on being active. Physical activity also reduces stress, eases frustrations and boosts self-confidence.

"Participating in team sports can really boost a child's self-esteem, so parents should not deny their children the opportunity to play a sport just because they use a cochlear implant," says Robyn Chapman, Au.D., CCC/A, cochlear implant audiologist at Columbia University Medical Center in New York. "In my eight years of working with children who use cochlear implants and their families, sports have never become a limitation for a child. If anything, the implant has provided them with the opportunity to participate in whatever they wanted to."

Scott Rinehart, a cochlear implant user, Cochlear Americas Awareness Network manager and avid soccer player, agrees. "More than anything, sports gave me confidence in myself and my abilities to communicate, and that confidence grew even more with the ability to hear with a cochlear implant. It also taught me to find ways to solve problems and still be successful. Those skills have certainly helped me out in all areas of my life."

Listen Up

Not only will your child's physical development benefit from sports, his or her listening skills will get a workout, too.

"Children who participate in sports will have specific auditory demands that may differ significantly from their daily auditory demands," says Sophie Ambrose, research associate and



Photo credit: Tiffani Hill-Patterson

Riley Patterson, 7, looks for an open teammate to pass the ball to in fall 2008.



Photo credit: Tiffani Hill-Patterson

Riley Patterson scores a run during her first softball season in spring 2008.

pediatric speech language pathologist at House Ear Institute in Los Angeles. "For example, children must listen for sounds such as a buzzer signifying the end of a period in basketball. These sounds may not be sounds that children are experiencing in their daily environment. Additionally, children will typically be unable to lip read when their coach provides information during sporting activities, thus requiring them to rely entirely on their auditory abilities."

Rachel Chaikof, a bilateral cochlear implant user and photography major at Savannah College of Art and Design, says sports helped her learn to use her hearing better. "Playing soccer, basketball and flag football gave me really good practice in learning to hear in greater distances with background noises," she says. "My teammates could be on the other side of the field calling me to pass the ball to them, and I had to learn to respond to them quickly to ensure that we would win points."

Build Skills

Also, being involved in athletics will expand your child's language development. Each sport has a specialized language and knowing it will add to his or her vocabulary. For instance, the word "run" means different things in softball – it can be a noun, as in the point scored when someone crosses

home plate, or a verb, as in what you do after you hit the ball. The same logic applies in basketball with "shoot" and "shot."

"I remember the first time Krystyna's basketball coach told her to shoot," says Marcy Miller of Plainville, Conn., mom to a 7-year-old who uses bilateral cochlear implants. "Krystyna stopped and looked at her. She had no clue what that meant. I had to explain to the coach that a child with hearing loss picks up vocabulary differently than other children. They may not pick things up incidentally – they have to learn many words one by one."

Chapman adds, "Children with cochlear implants can always benefit from being surrounded by their typical hearing peers and they can be good language models. Participating in sports can encourage language development in situations that are different from everyday activities."

But perhaps Krystyna's story best illustrates how sports enhance a child's life.

"Krystyna is doing something that she is naturally good at," Miller says.

"Because of this, other children are seeing her as a 'child,' not a 'hearing-impaired child.' Since she is not treated any differently, she does not see herself as different." ♪

Tiffani Hill-Patterson writes about health, parenting, fitness and sports. She



Photo credit: Tiffani Hill-Patterson

Riley Patterson is ready to make the throw to first.

also blogs about her family's experience with deafness and cochlear implants at <http://soundcheckmama.blogspot.com>. You can contact her at patterson1723@mac.com or visit <http://tiffanihillpatterson.com>.

DUBARD ASSOCIATION METHOD

Accredited at IMSLEC'S Teaching, Instructor of Teaching, Therapy and Instructor of Therapy Levels

Creating Success for Students with Hearing Loss and Additional Language, Speech or Learning Disorders

DUBARD ASSOCIATION METHOD BASIC COURSE

Hattiesburg, Miss., September 22-24 and October 20-22, 2009 (two-part course)

THE DUBARD SYMPOSIUM: DYSLEXIA AND RELATED DISORDERS

Hattiesburg, Miss., February 4-5, 2010

Customized Professional Development at your site



For additional information
Phone: 601.266.5223
Web site: www.usm.edu/dubard
E-mail: dubard@usm.edu

AAE0EJADAI RS 210