



GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CONDITIONING FOR YOUNG HOCKEY PLAYERS

Physical performance and athletic development are the same process in children. Though capacity can be measured at a point in time, more important is the trend: flat, upwards, or regressing. It is common in sport to set baseline expectations of fitness, especially in representative and high performing environments, but as parents and coaches of children it is more important to promote behaviours that can be used as development platforms to achieve fitness outcomes.

Athletic development is a vertical process in that there are basic resources with which advanced skills are learned. The foundations of athletic development and performance are the structural health of the body (i.e. posture) and basic motor skills. Basic motor skills, such as straight line running and jumping, need to be strong and efficient before more demanding skills such as quickness and agility can be mastered. Conditioning should always begin by reinforcing the foundations, and progress to more advanced movements in keeping with the strength of the foundations.

The behaviours that drive physical outcomes also reflect vertical development. A small daily self-managed commitment can be leveraged for more demanding self-driven outcomes. Schooling understands this general principle and employs it to ensure children are largely self-managed by the time high school is completed. We don't run before we walk so the starting point in exercise is a small daily commitment: a short run, and 5min of stretching.

The table below shows the conditioning targets for hockey players alongside the associated hockey outcomes:

GENERAL CAPACITIES	ASSOCIATED HOCKEY OUTCOMES
High fitness/ work capacity	High engagement/ output for the full match and throughout tournaments
Basic run skills – strong ankle SSC	Repeated high-power output and fast recovery from fatigue
Complex run skills: agility, acceleration, and deceleration	Efficient and powerful running gait
Squatting and lunging skills	Quick, reactive movement
Warm-up work habit	Excellent control of the stick with body weight/ momentum behind shots/ strokes
Stretching and post-exercise recovery work habit	Excellent physical and mental preparation
Self-directed with a strong sense of purpose and trust in preparation	Low injury risk and high recovery

The basic habits that must be promoted are:

1. Good posture, and daily stretching and self-massage
2. Jogging x 2/week. The starting point is 15-20min or 3km
3. Lots of informal activity and variety in sport. All activity matters and the broader the range of influences, the stronger the development of general motor skill and athleticism