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# Are Trampolines Too Risky?

It's all fun and games until someone ends up on crutches. **BY JUSTIN O'NEILL**

**T**homas, 13, and his friends Mark and Josh had a fantastic idea. Why not play a game of football . . . on a trampoline?

At first, it was great fun. The boys passed and tackled while bouncing up and down.

Then Mark stumbled, tripped, and crashed, landing directly on Thomas's leg. Instantly, the ligaments—that is, the rubber-band-like tissues that connect

bones—in Thomas's knee ripped. Thomas howled in pain.

### Not a Toy

Even if you've never been injured on a trampoline, chances are you know someone who has. There were nearly 95,000 trampoline-related injuries in 2012 alone. Young kids are most at risk; up to 37 percent of emergency-room patients injured on trampolines were younger than age 6.

These injuries are such an enormous problem that the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), a group of doctors who specialize in treating children and adolescents, said in a 2012 study that trampolines should never be used at home or on playgrounds.

*Never.*  
"This is not a toy. It's a piece of equipment," says Dr. Michele LaBotz, an author of the AAP study.

Indeed, when trampolines were invented in the 1930s, they were intended for use by professional acrobats. Later, they were used to train military pilots. Over time, trampolines caught on with the public, and now 900,000 are sold each year, most of them for recreational use.

Part of trampolines' appeal is that despite the risks, they provide good exercise. You get a heart-pumping aerobic workout, like you do when running or dancing. And young people need all the exercise they can get. A 2011 survey shows that only 29 percent of high school students get the amount of exercise



the U.S. Department of Health recommends.

Still, trampolines can be dangerous—and not just for kids who fall off. (Safety nets, incidentally, provide little or no protection.) Kids are also getting hurt on the springs and when they collide with each other. Strains, sprains, broken bones, bruises, and serious injuries to the head and neck have been reported. One out of every 200 trampoline injuries leads to permanent brain damage. As a tragic example, this past September, a 14-year-old from Utah broke his neck after attempting a double backflip on a friend's trampoline. He is now paralyzed.

### Don't Jump to Conclusions

Bouncing on a trampoline is clearly risky. But then, every athletic activity involves risk. Kids fall off bikes and skateboards all the time. As with any sport, kids on a trampoline can protect themselves. For instance: Never allow more than one person on a trampoline at a time. (About 75 percent of injuries result from having multiple jumpers at once.) Don't do flips, and always have adult supervision.

If only Thomas had been more careful. Not only did his emergency-room visit cost \$2,000, but he also missed out on a weekend trip to a friend's cabin and spent three miserable weeks on crutches.

He then had another fantastic idea: Stay off trampolines. ●

Debate

## What Do You Think?

**Do the risks associated with trampolines outweigh the benefits?** Use evidence from the article to support each side of this debate. Write the information on the lines below.



YES THEY'RE DEATH TRAPS!	NO THEY'RE SO MUCH FUN!
1 They cause many injuries, including very serious ones.	1
2	2
3	3

**EXAMINE POINTS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE—AS WELL AS YOUR OWN BELIEFS**—and decide if the risks of trampoline use outweigh the benefits. State your opinion in one sentence below. This can become the thesis statement for an argument essay.

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