

# Winter Workouts

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During the off-season, young players should concentrate on improving the fundamentals. Coaches should place emphasis on individual vs. team workouts.

For many young players, winter is the ideal time to improve their batting skills. Many winter workout facilities in the colder regions have indoor batting cages for this purpose.

Hitting instruction should focus on mechanics (stance to follow-through), power, situational hitting, and bunting. In addition to fine tuning the physical aspects of hitting, winter workouts are an ideal time to focus on the mental aspects of hitting; during the season, in the last inning of a pressure-packed game, is not the right time to teach a young player about mental preparation for hitting. Even the youngest player needs to understand basic mental approaches to hitting. Developing a positive attitude about hitting and demonstrating the importance of understanding various game situations before stepping into the batter's box are two key points that should be included in instruction for young batters. The older players should be taught more advanced mental approaches, such as studying the pitcher, catcher, and defense and making adjustments based on different game situations.

No matter what individual skills your young player chooses to focus on during winter workouts, conditioning and staying in shape is essential. Some winter workout programs concentrate exclusively on strength, speed and agility training, with instruction on base running and base stealing included. Staying strong and flexible during the winter will help prevent injuries when it's time to play ball in the spring. This is especially true for young pitchers. Weight training and aerobic activity appropriate for the pitcher's age is recommended. Winter is also an ideal time for pitchers to fine tune their pickoff moves and to practice pitchers' fielding situations (throwing to first base, fielding bunts and covering first base). Pitchers can work on proper throwing mechanics during the winter and start throwing regularly 6 weeks prior to the beginning of the season. But don't overexert your young pitcher's arm. Your coach or pitching instructor can provide a throwing workout that is appropriate to the player's age, experience level and other factors.