

Published August 3rd, 2011

To Bounce or Not to Bounce...

By Cathy Tyson



Miles Elze, left, and Fox Fleischmann spend some quality time on the Fleischmann's backyard trampoline. Photo Doug Kohen

deadman, kick ball, cat and mouse and fish out of water. Holly especially likes to have sleep-overs on it. In the winter, the kids wear their furry swim parkas and during the summer, Dad RJ has hooked up "misters" that spray a fine mist of water over the tramp - kids can wear their suits and slide on the surface. "It's a 10!" exclaims Fox.

"If you could harness that energy, you could light a small city," said photographer Doug Kohen last week as he was photographing Fox Fleischmann and his friend, Miles Elze. Both boys are going into third grade at Springhill Elementary.

Concerned about safety, the Fleischmanns purchased a double bounce model that has two layers, kind of a shock absorber designed to reduce the risk of injury, along with an enclosure. With one minor exception, they've never had an injury in five years of constant use. In fact, all the trampolines researched for this story had enclosures that keep participants on the bouncy surface rather than in the surrounding grass or dirt.

However the American Academy of Pediatrics estimates 100,000 people were injured on trampolines in 1999, roughly two-thirds of them were children between six and fourteen. Sprains and fractures resulting from falls on the trampoline mat, falls on the frame or springs and collisions with other jumpers are the most common injuries, according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons. Proponents argue that bicycle users have three and a half times as many emergency room visits than trampoline users.

In Moraga, 17-year-old Mina Lucacher is on the verge of growing out of the family's backyard trampoline, but still enjoys it. "At first, I was on it every single day," she said. Now, six years later, she prefers to read on it, because the surface gets warm, and for occasional sleepovers with friends. Her mom, Sophie, explains that the three kids, Mina, Michael and Andrea, begged endlessly for it. Now that they are all teenagers, the bloom is slightly off the rose.

Despite rare but possible injuries, due to their expanding popularity a trampoline park has recently opened in Dublin - Rockin' Jump, a 20,000 square foot building that houses a main trampoline park with a dodgeball zone and basketball area. Not surprisingly a signed waiver is required for every Rockin' Jumper. Closer to home is Sky High Sports in Concord, a warehouse with wall to wall trampolines that also has dodgeball, basketball and a foam pit full of squishy foam cubes to jump into. It's possible these young participants may end up in the brand new Olympic sport, inaugurated in 2008 in Beijing - trampolining.

Here are the steps you can take to help prevent serious trampoline injuries from the Consumer Product Safety Commission:

- Allow only one person on the trampoline at a time.
- Do not attempt or allow somersaults because landing on the head or neck can cause paralysis.
- Do not use the trampoline without shock-absorbing pads that completely cover its springs, hooks, and frame.
- Place the trampoline away from structures, trees, and other play areas.
- No child under 6 years of age should use a full-size trampoline. Do not use a ladder with the trampoline because it provides unsupervised access by small children.
- Always supervise children who use a trampoline.
- Trampoline enclosures can help prevent injuries from falls off trampolines.

What's round, black, usually enclosed and full of summer fun? Many families with children who don't want the maintenance of a pool but want their kids to turn away from electronics and get some great exercise opt to install a trampoline in their backyard. Little ones up to high school and beyond can jump to their heart's content and get a terrific work out in the process.

"We love our trampoline," said busy Lafayette mom of four kids Madeline Fleischmann, explaining that her children and their neighborhood friends could spend hours on it, but it comes with a huge added bonus - right in their own backyard. She's already booked picking up and dropping off the kids' at lacrosse and swim team practices.

"I try to make it as friendly as possible," Fleischmann said, they have just a few rules they make the kids obey - no shoes and no toys, a parent has to be home and they need to check in before getting started. The family got the trampoline and a play structure five years ago at Christmastime. Since then the trampoline has seen constant use; the play structure - not so much. They eventually ended up getting rid of it.

Kids Fox, age 8, Gary, 9, Justice, 17, and Holly, 14, have had endless hours of fun with games like dodge ball,



Madeline Clark, of Moraga, enjoys her trampoline

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