



# 18 months *to* 36 months

## PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

*How are children becoming skillful at moving their bodies?*

### OVERVIEW

- Physical development and physical activity play an important role in health throughout a child's life span. In particular, being physically active protects against heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. It also contributes to mental health, happiness and psychological well-being.
- Physical movement skills are a basis for other types of learning and allow opportunities for children to engage with others, to explore, to learn, and to play.
- Physical activity prepares children for activities in later life, including fitness activities, organized sports, and recreation.
- Infants, toddlers and preschool children are developmentally ready and very motivated to learn new movement skills. The preschool period is an opportune time for young children to learn fundamental movement skills. If children do not learn those skills during the preschool period, they may have difficulty learning them later, and their ability to participate in physical activities may be affected for the long term.
- During the preschool years, children develop important movement skills. Those skills build on the physical development that happened for children in infancy and toddlerhood.
- We now know how much children learn through physical activity outdoors in the natural world. It is important for adults to help children have opportunities for this kind of play, as many children spend a majority of their time in front of a television or computer screen instead of engaged in physical activity.
- The more experience children have with physical activities, the more confidence they develop and the more willing they are to try new things and develop new skills. Children who spend a lot of time in front of the television or the computer may be less willing to try new physical challenges and may miss the chance to develop important physical skills.



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- Research highlights the benefits of experiencing nature for children and shows that children prefer spending time in natural settings. Further, we also know that access to green, outdoor spaces improves children's thinking skills and their well-being and relationships.

### **Infant/Toddler Introduction**

Physical development for infants and toddlers includes learning skills such as rolling over, sitting up, crawling, walking, and running. Through these abilities, children are able to see and interact with their surroundings in different ways. Children's physical development is related to their growth in all other areas. When a child pulls up to a standing position she can see the top of the table, and new opportunities for exploration of the magazines and cups on the table open up. When an infant begins to push a stroller, she learns about new ideas like motion. When she pushes the stroller over to another friend, who puts a baby in the stroller, she expands her social skills, as well.

By the time they are 36 months of age, children have accomplished many physical tasks, including running, climbing, jumping, throwing, kicking, turning, carrying and pedaling. They are doing all of these tasks with some skill and coordination and can combine some; for instance, they can run while carrying something, they can climb and jump, and they can dance, moving arms, legs and their whole bodies.

### ***In the months leading up to 36 months you may see a toddler:***

- Jump off the bottom step.
- Jump forward a few inches.
- Kick a ball.
- Catch a ball using two arms.
- Walk up or down stairs by stepping with both feet on each step, without holding on.
- Walk on tiptoes.
- Ride on a ride-on toy without pedals.



***Some of the things you might see a 36-month-old do include:***

- Walk and run, going faster and slower and making turns.
- Throw and kick a ball (without much skill).
- Pedal a tricycle.
- Climb up on climbing structures and ladders.
- Walk up stairs, putting a foot on each step, without holding the railing.
- Walk backward.
- Jump up with both feet.
- Catch a ball.

***Tips for families to support toddler physical development:***

- Toddlers need lots of opportunities to move, to run, to climb, to jump and to throw. They enjoy carrying heavy things and building with blocks and other natural materials.
- Toddlers love to push things, including boxes, small strollers and carts.
- Toddlers love to build and stack things (and knock them down). They will do this with almost anything they can find—cans and boxes from the cupboard, sticks and leaves from outside, small scraps of wood from the lumber store, or sets of building blocks. When toddlers make things fall and stack and try to make things stay up, they are learning about gravity.

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- Toddlers also love to climb, and some will climb on anything they can find (chairs, tables, shelves, couches, benches). Decide what is safe for your child to climb on and remind them to climb on those things when they start climbing on other things. Climbing gives children a chance to develop strength, balance and coordination.

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- You can also use mattresses, cushions and low platforms for children to practice their climbing up and down.
- Outdoor playgrounds provide opportunities for climbing for young children, as do natural areas with logs, boulders and hills. You and your child can explore your neighborhood for appropriate climbing places.
- Children will sometimes fall when they are climbing, and most of the time they catch themselves and only get small scratches. These simple falls are also how they learn. They often want to go back to the same spot to try climbing again and will do it successfully because of what they learned the previous time.
- When your child begins to climb, it is important that you look around the area to see if it is a safe environment.
- Toddlers enjoy trying out their new skills outside, as well as inside. Even short walks outside give children a chance to try out new surfaces for walking, running and jumping, and to watch the birds and experience what the community has to offer.
- Children at this age also enjoy throwing. You can provide a variety of soft balls that they can throw and can even make small, soft balls out of socks or yarn.
- Children also enjoy carrying things, such as small baskets or purses with handles that they can use to fill and carry—recycled water bottles, or other things they find. They love dumping as much as they love filling, so they may turn the container over as soon as they get it filled. They are fascinated with how objects move and how things change. When all the objects are in the basket they look one way. When the objects are dumped out on the floor, they spread out. Children ask themselves: “Will they change their arrangement again if I put them back in the basket?”
- Children also like to stretch their muscles by carrying or moving heavy things. A sealed bottle or box of laundry detergent would be fun for them to move. They enjoy carrying small stools around so they can reach a book off the shelf. They can help bring in small bags of groceries or push the laundry basket to the table for folding.

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