



8 months *to* 18 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.



- 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.

Around 18 months, toddlers are able to walk, and many are running, as well. They are interested in climbing, throwing, carrying things around, pushing and pulling things, dumping things out of containers and exploring how everything works. Their muscles are developing, and they are able to carry heavier things. They have learned a lot about how their bodies move and have developed some coordination. They are able to do many things without falling and when they do fall, they are good at catching themselves and falling in ways that don't seriously hurt them.

In the months leading up to 18 months, you may see toddlers:

- Crawl on hands and knees
- Crawl/climb up or down a few stairs.
- Pull to a stand and walk around the edges of furniture, holding on.
- Sit down from a standing position.
- Walk unassisted.
- Squat and stand up without holding on to something.



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

- Throw a ball or other object.
- Walk up or down stairs, holding on to a hand or railing (one step at a time).

Some of the things you might see an 18-month-old do include:

- Running.
- Climbing onto the couch.
- Standing on one foot.
- Walking sideways.
- Pushing a stroller or small shopping cart.

Tips for families to support young toddler physical development:

- Young toddlers are often newly mobile and eager to be on the move. They need supervision, as they are encountering many new things as they move around. In a safe environment supervised by you, young toddlers will keep trying to learn more complex physical skills.

In a safe environment supervised by you, young toddlers will keep trying to learn more complex physical skills.

- As children are becoming mobile, it is useful for them to have low, safe things to pull up on and walk around. Couches and couch cushions placed on the floor can be an interesting obstacle course where they can walk from one thing to the next, holding on.
- When they begin walking, it is important to make sure their area is free from sharp edges, since they fall as much as they walk.
- Beginning walkers love to push things, including boxes, small strollers and carts.
- Beginning walkers may still use crawling to get from one place to another.
- Children at 18 months also love to climb and learn how to go up before they learn how to come down. If you have stairs, you may want to gate



How are children becoming skillful at moving their bodies? PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

them off above the second step so that your toddler can practice climbing without going too high.

- You can also use mattresses, cushions and low platforms for children to practice their climbing up and down.
- When children are learning how to go up and down low platforms, they will sometimes bump their faces as they come down. Through observation, you may see that they will soon go back to the same place to try it again and after a few tries will change their approach so they don't bump their heads again.
- Young toddlers enjoy trying out their new skills outside, as well as inside. Even very short walks outside give children a chance to try out new surfaces for walking, watch the birds, and encounter 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. Young toddlers are fascinated with how things move and change. Objects that they can move, re-organize, and put in different places give them important opportunities to learn.

Young toddlers are fascinated with how things move and change. Objects that they can move, re-organize, and put in different places give them important opportunities to learn.

allaboutyoungchildren.org/english/