



Birth to 8 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 he 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, he learns about new ideas like motion. When he pushes the stroller over to another friend, who puts a baby in the stroller, he expands her social skills, as well.

An infant's growing ability to control her body movements develops rapidly in the first 8 months of life. By 8 months, some infants are beginning to move from one place to another—through rolling, full-body crawling along the ground, or crawling on all fours. Many are sitting up, and some have begun to pull to a standing position. In the first 8 months, infants also develop the ability to use their hands to hold onto objects and to move those objects in different ways. All of these abilities help an infant to interact with the world in more and more interesting ways.

In the months leading up to 8 months you may see an infant:

- Laying on his back and playing with his foot.
- Rolling from his back to his front.
- Using both hands to hold something in front of him while laying on his back.
- Rolling from front to back.
- Getting up on hands and knees and rocking back and forth.



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- Moving from hands and knees into a sitting position.
- Sitting up on his own and turning to the side to look at something or pick something up.

Some typical things you might see an 8-month-old doing include:

- Sitting up on her own without support or assistance.
- Moving from a sitting position forward to her hands and knees.
- Pulling herself forward using her arms, while lying on her tummy.

Tips for families to support infant physical development:

- Infants need plenty of time to move freely. You can place her on a blanket on her back on the floor in a safe place. This gives your baby a chance to practice moving hands, arms, feet and legs. It builds core strength and gives your baby an opportunity to get to know her body.
- You can lay beside your baby so that he can see your face and you can observe the way he moves.
- From this position, your baby will strengthen all the muscles she needs to learn to turn over.
- Reminder: Never leave a baby unattended on a high surface like a bed. She may turn over—even if you haven't seen her do it before—and fall off the bed.
- When he starts reaching for things, you can place a few simple toys within his reach. Placing a few simple toys within your baby's reach gives your baby a chance to practice grasping things and build skills.

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- It will take a while for him to get good at grasping things, but practice will build his skills.
- Even non-mobile babies enjoy time outside. You can put a blanket on the grass or another surface at the park, where your infant can lay and



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experience the sounds of birds, the wind moving the leaves and the feel of the fresh air.

- When she begins to move about through rolling or pulling forward with her arms, you can clear a bigger space for her to move. At this stage, you can put interesting toys slightly beyond her reach so that she will have the satisfaction of getting to them.
- Look around the floor carefully to be sure that everything she can reach and pick up is safe for her to explore and put in her mouth.
- When your baby starts to crawl, it is important to create an even larger safe space for him to explore. Even without a lot of space, you can put interesting things in the space for him to explore, like clean lids, cotton scarves, chewy toys, and different kinds of containers and cooking pots.
- Your infant is naturally motivated to learn new skills and will likely progress from one skill to the next without being “taught” how to do the next thing. She doesn’t need fancy equipment like bouncers or walkers to help them develop, and sometimes those pieces of equipment can actually hinder his development. Your baby naturally learns and practices new physical skills. Being free to move in a safe place is usually all your baby needs to keep making progress.

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