



Cultivating Child Development Series

Gross Motor Skills - Preschool Stage

Gross motor is an important aspect of motor development. It includes the basic abilities of balance, coordination and strength, which enable us to sit, crawl, walk, run, jump and participate in play activities such as ball skills.

My child is nearly 1½ years old but still cannot walk on his own. How can I help him?

In general, infants can roll from supine to prone at 5 months old, sit without support at 6 months old, pull up to stand holding onto support at 8 months old, crawl at 9 months old, and walk by themselves at 12 months old. However, children with gross motor delay may lag behind their peers at these developmental milestones.

Some parents may think that infants can acquire walking skill earlier by using baby walkers. However, if truncal strength is insufficient, walking with baby walker may lead to habitual toe walking which is difficult to correct. It is more appropriate to start with encouraging your child to stand and cruise with support. Toys can be used to facilitate them stepping towards adults. Or they can walk with hands pushing big toy or chair forward. If they are not confident in taking steps, parents may hold one hand, left or right alternately to build up the strength and balance of both sides of the body. Park activities are also essential to facilitate gross motor skills.

Parents are advised to be patient and encouraging. Novel and funny objects or playmates can stimulate children to take their first step with confidence.



What can I do if my child falls easily?

When children with gross motor delay start walking, they may fall more often than other kids due to weak muscle strength and balance. Their protective reactions are slow and delayed. They are less aware of obstacles in the environment, especially when being distracted or feeling tired. They will bump into objects and fall easily with disturbance. Therefore, home exercises and outdoor activities are both very important to improve their strength and coordination.

Children can participate in simple games such as standing on one leg, bunny hop, jumping over obstacles, jumping sideways alternately, or hopping on the spot indoors even in a limited space. These activities help to improve muscle strength and coordination. Competition can be incorporated in the activities to increase motivation and participation.

Parents should bring children to the park more often. In the park, they can climb, go up and down stairs, play chasing game to build up strength. They can walk forward, backward or sideways along beam or road curbs to improve balance. Cycling is also a good activity to train up balance and coordination. Park facilities such as slide, swing and ball games are good for development of coordination and physical fitness.

What can I do if my child prefers to stay home, shows no interest in physical activities and becomes overweight?

Once children with gross motor delay acquired walking, running and jumping, parents usually focus more on their learning, writing and behaviour instead of gross motor development. Parents are not aware of any physical problem because their children prefer to stay indoors and remain sedentary. They have so little gross motor activities that they have no chance to fall. Parents start to realize that something is wrong when their children complain of tiredness frequently and request to be carried after walking for short time. They may also get exhausted easily and panting just after a few minutes of exercise. Some children may even become obese owing to the lack of physical activities.



As a vicious cycle, children with poor gross motor abilities would prefer sedentary activities in order to avoid fatigue and failure. As a result, they rarely participate in physical activities and have poor physical fitness; some of them may become overweight. Therefore, parents should encourage them to participate in at least one physical activity which they are interested in, such as dancing, taekwondo, swimming, cycling, gymnastics or ball games. All children should keep regular exercises in order to grow up healthily.

If you have any enquiry, please consult the physiotherapist.

References and further reading:

1. Children exercise 【兒童體能訓練 #07】
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LES02HC6xg>
3. “Let’s dance”
https://youtu.be/6GNCrjY_jac
4. 2 to 4 years old gross motor activities, Heep Hong Society
<https://youtu.be/uUmlFZ3HB-U>
5. 2 to 3 years old gross motor activities 心晴童你屋企學
<https://youtu.be/PI2LU0VrgBY>
6. Play together 一起玩親子遊戲
https://youtu.be/RXQJuc5g_7w
7. Toddlers Moving and Learning: A Physical Education Curriculum (Moving & Learning)
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8. Preschoolers and Kindergartners Moving and Learning: A Physical Education Curriculum
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9. Activities for Gross Motor Skills Development Early Childhood Paperback – February 20,
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