

Monthly Message: DEVELOPING GROSS AND FINE MOTOR SKILLS

One joy of raising small children is rediscovering the wonder of common skills we take for granted. From the first time your baby holds up his head, to the first time she takes her first step, each new skill becomes a celebrated milestone. These skills build on each other to help children grow and succeed in life. Developing gross motor and fine motor skills early in life are an important part of getting your child kindergarten ready. These skills will allow your child to do common kindergarten work like cutting with scissors or learning to write.

Gross motor skills are the movement and coordination of large muscle groups in the body. Examples include walking, hopping and kicking. Fine motor skills are the coordination small muscles in the hands and fingers. Examples include tying shoelaces and buttoning coats.

These skills help children learn how to control their movements and they help provide the physical activity needed to stay healthy. Gross and fine motor skills can both be developed through play. Below, you will find some activity ideas your child can do to build gross motor skills at home.

While children develop at different rates, spotting physical development delays early can help children get the help they need. Visit motordelay.aap.org and talk to your child's pediatrician if you have any concerns about your child's development.

Gross Motor SKILLS



Infants

Tummy time is a great way to develop muscles children need to roll over, sit up and walk. Place your child on his or her stomach, while awake, for 3-5 minutes at least twice a day. It is normal for babies to cry at first, but they eventually enjoy playing in this position. To encourage reaching, place a safe toy in front of your baby.

Toddlers

- Hang on rings on a jungle gym.
- Kick a ball outside.
- Push a toy lawn mower or pull a wagon with toys in backyard.
- Walk up stairs while holding your hand or handrail.

Preschoolers

- Climb ladder at playground.
- Hop or skip down the driveway or sidewalk.
- Practice riding a bicycle with training wheels.
- Play catch with a ball outside.
- Stand on one foot to practice balancing.
- Jump rope outside.

FINE MOTOR SKILLS

Fine motor skills are more coordinated muscle movements that develop as your child gains mobility, stability, cognitive and emotional/social development. These building blocks allow your child to do common fine motor skills such as picking up Cheerios. Developing strong hands and wrists are important in developing the skills needed to write. Fine motor skills build hand-eye coordination that children use to do activities like playing sports or instruments. It's normal for fine motor skills to develop more slowly than gross motor skills. They tend to require more patience and a deeper thought process than gross motor skills. Smaller muscles are also likely to get tired more quickly than larger muscles.

Infants

During the first three months, babies hands naturally stay in fists and grip tightly around adult fingers. In the first year, infants will develop skills like moving items from one hand to another, grabbing their own feet and toys and squeezing toys.

- Put things in containers with large opening and take them out again (ex. empty tissue box).
- Make or buy a rattle for your baby to shake.
- Allow your child to hold a spoon or bottle. It may get messy but it's good practice.
- Practice waving hello and goodbye.
- Clap hands while listening to music or singing.

Toddlers

- Put Cheerios in an ice cube tray and challenge your child to get them out using pointer finger and thumb (known as Pincer Grasp).
- Encourage your child to point at pictures in a book during story time.
- Draw lines and circles with large crayon or marker. Tape paper to table so it stays still.
- Playing with play dough strengthens finger muscles when children squeeze and stretch.
- Make macaroni necklaces. Try using penne noodles and a thick string to start then try smaller beads as your child improves.



Preschoolers

- Practice pouring water from a pitcher into a cup outside.
- Play with puzzles and interlocking blocks.
- Help with meal prep (stir, chop, mix food).
- Thread pipe cleaners through the holes of a colander.