



Preschooler *focus*

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND MOTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

The preschool years are known as the 'Golden Age' of motor development. It is during these years (3-to 5-years of age) that important skills like running, jumping, throwing, and catching are developed. Through play and physical activity, kids learn and practice skills that become building blocks for more complicated movements.

Physical activity helps preschoolers develop motor skills today that they will need for tomorrow

Right from birth, your child is learning how to control their body movements and how to interact with the world around them. This learning process is called motor skill development. Motor skills can be divided into three types: locomotor (e.g. running, hopping, jumping), object control (e.g. throwing, catching, kicking), and stability and balance. It is during the preschool years that children improve the most in these skills. Physical activity is important for motor development, especially for improving locomotor skills. Research has found that children who spend the most time in moderate to vigorous physical

activity tend to have the highest motor skill. Children who are the least active have the lowest motor skills. This may be because physically active children spend more time learning and improving new motor skills. Children with better motor skills may also find physical activity easier and more fun. We know that motor skills do not always improve naturally. As a parent or caregiver, it is important to introduce children to new movements and create opportunities for them to practice. By encouraging physical activity, you not only help children improve their motor skills, but you also help them increase their confidence!



Intensity Matters

There are many different forms of physical activity, but not all of them benefit your child in the same way. Research shows that moderate to vigorous physical activity is most important for developing motor skills. Here are some visible signs that can indicate the intensity of your child's physical activity:

Sedentary: child is not participating in any physical movement (e.g. TV viewing, reading, drawing, naps)

Light: child is not out of breath (e.g. moving about, standing up, walking at a slow pace)

Moderate to Vigorous: child's heart is beating fast; child may be out of breath (e.g. running, swimming, biking)



Motor development happens when children are exposed to new skills. Remember to create opportunities for learning, encourage practice, and give lots of support!

“Help me to do by myself,
Don't do it in my place
But remain with me.”
-Maria Montessori



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Learn about your preschooler's health and physical activity through a study conducted at McMaster University! Contact Nicole at proudfna@mcmaster.ca or (905) 521-2100 x.77217 or visit us online at fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp

Recommendations for Motor Skill Development

As a parent or caregiver, here are some ways that you can help improve your child's motor development:

- **Demonstrate** and explain a new skill to your child (e.g. hopping, standing on one foot) and then give him or her the opportunity to practice. Remember, kids learn best by copying you!
- **Dedicate** enough space and equipment for helping girls and boys improve both their object control skills and locomotor skills. This could mean giving them room to run around or giving them a ball to play with.
- **Develop** creative ways of teaching new skills. Kids love to play, so learning and practicing movement should be fun. Games are a great way of engaging children.

Did You Know?



Differences between Boys & Girls:

Motor development is not always the same for boys and girls. Research shows that boys tend to be better at object control skills (e.g. throwing, catching) while girls usually have better locomotor skills (e.g. hopping, galloping).

Spend time working on skills that your child finds difficult to help them improve!

Take Advantage of Summer!

Summer is a great time to get outdoors and be active. Here are some fun activities that will get children moving and practicing some new motor skills:

- 🌸 Set up an obstacle course for children and pretend they are going on a jungle adventure or a treasure hunt (e.g. crawl through a tunnel, tiptoe past a sleeping animal, jump over fallen branches etc.)
- 🌸 Play follow the leader and have children skip, gallop like a horse, hop like a bunny etc.
- 🌸 Play a game of freeze dance: children dance as music plays and once it stops, children have to freeze like statues
- 🌸 Help children draw their own hopscotch using sidewalk chalk and then play
- 🌸 Try dribbling a basketball, kicking and trapping a soccer ball, throwing and catching a tennis ball
- 🌸 Blow bubbles then chase and pop them
- 🌸 Go swimming or let children run through a sprinkler
- 🌸 Walk or bike to the nearest park or playground where kids can enjoy some free play

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Active Healthy Kids Canada (www.activehealthykids.ca)
- Best Start Resource Centre (www.beststart.org/haveaballtogether/campaign.html)
- Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (www.cflri.ca)
- McMaster University Child Health & Exercise Medicine Program (fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp)
- ParticipACTION (www.participaction.com)

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