



## The importance of physical activity in the first six years of life

### Normal Childhood Development of Physical Skills

#### What is normal skill development?

A child learns new skills - like crawling, walking and running only when her/his body is ready. This means when he/she is strong enough to do the activity, and when the brain and nerves are developed enough to send the right messages to the right muscles. All of this takes time, and can't be rushed.

While there are general age ranges for typical development, the brain, nerves and muscles develop at different times in different children. A child who is later-than-average in learning to crawl sometimes walks before those "early" crawlers, and the early walker may be the last to learn to run or jump. Every child is unique.

#### When should a child be able to crawl, walk and run?

There is no easy answer to this question, and there is a VERY wide range of ages that are completely normal.

Parenting books often provide an "average age" that children crawl, stand, walk and run, but this average age should be used with caution.

What is far more important than the average age is the NORMAL RANGE of ages at which children learn the different movement skills. Take crawling for example.

Some children learn to crawl at around 5 months, and many start to crawl at 7 months. Others do not start crawling until they are 10-11 months old. About 1 in 10 babies never crawl, but go straight to walking when the body is ready. All of this is normal. There is NO long-term advantage for a child who is an

early walker, and no long-term disadvantage for the child who is later learning to crawl. As long as the child hits movement milestones any time within the normal range, there is no need to be concerned - the skill will come when the body is ready, and not before.

#### When should parents be concerned?

So when should a parent or caregiver start to be concerned if their child is unable to do the same movement skills as other children of the same age?

There is no clear answer, but if a child is much later than most of his/her peers in several different actions, then it would be wise to mention this to a health care provider who will know if there is a need to investigate.

Providing children with active role models, encouragement, and the opportunity to safely use their body to explore their environment will help all children develop their physical abilities.

It is important for parents and caregivers to provide children with the opportunity to learn movement skills, and to encourage them to physically explore their play spaces. Children also need a safe and stimulating environment in which they can play. Remember that many short periods of vigorous play per day are best. For optimum development, children should probably not go longer than one hour without being active (unless, of course, they are sleeping).



#### Key Ideas:

Each child will develop at their own rate and will learn physical skills when their body is ready.

The "average age" for crawling, walking, and running doesn't mean much. What is important is that a child learns within the normal range of ages.

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