



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

### Play Activities - Ages One to Three

#### 10 fun things to help a child develop good physical skills

This is an age when activity needs to be fun so that children develop a life-long love of activity.

##### Toddlers

- (1) As a child learns to walk:
  - ★ Walk on different surfaces - on tiles, carpet, soft grass, or in the sand.
  - ★ Find gentle uphill and downhill areas to walk on together. If the weather permits, have the child walk in shoes and in bare feet.
  - ★ As a child becomes more confident walking, try walking on any lines drawn on the ground and stepping over cracks in the sidewalk. For older children, have them do the same thing: running and eventually hopping.
- (2) Cut out shapes from old carpet (or use pavement chalk to draw the shapes), such as squares, circles and triangles. Place them on the floor (using double sided tape to stop them from moving) just far enough apart so that the child can take a big step from one to the other. Increase the space between the shapes, and encourage the child to jump from one to the other. Play games with the child running around the shapes and then call out instructions such as "Stop on the square," "Jump over the circle". Have more than one child try to stand on the shape at the same time.
- (3) Use a soft ball that doesn't roll too far, kick it gently to the child, and have her/him use her/his feet to kick it back. Don't worry if he/she picks it up or wants to roll it back with their hands - it all helps the eyes learn to track the movement of the ball.
- (4) At bath time, let children kick their feet up and down in the bathtub. In the Summer, have them sit in a wading pool and make as big a splash with their feet as they can. Start encouraging them to put their face in the water - at first for just an instant and eventually for longer periods.
- (5) When they are comfortable on their feet, get children into skates (or the strap on skates that go over their winter boots) and support them as they walk and start to glide on ice (make sure they wear a skating helmet). If you can't skate - consider learning with the child.
- (6) Play "catch" with the child. Use a large ball that is very soft (so that it won't hurt them if it hits their face). Stand facing the child no more than a foot or two away, have the child make a basket with their arms, and gently toss the ball into their arms.
- (7) Get the child on wheels - sit-on buggies, scooters or small tricycles (they can either peddle or move around by pushing with their feet). Let them try wheeling on smooth hard surfaces and rougher carpets or grass so that they feel the difference in how hard they have to push. Always use a bike helmet.
- (8) Find a sturdy, smooth stick. Wrap some hockey tape around one end as a handle, and encourage the child to use it to hit a ball, a tin-can or anything else that will move. If it makes a noise when it's hit, that's a great encouragement. As the child gets better control of the stick, start rolling a large ball towards her/him so she/he can hit it.
- (9) Follow-the-leader. Take turns with the child being the leader and the follower. When it's your turn to lead, try making different shapes with your body. Stand as tall as you can with your arms above your head, crouch down small, grow like a flower, or fly like a bird. Try jumping, walking, running and suddenly changing direction, or stopping and starting. Vary speed, effort and level (sometimes low and sometimes high). When the child is leading, encourage her/him to exaggerate their movements. From time to time, have the child do things you can't (like squeeze through a child sized gap), which will give the child a great sense of achievement.
- (10) Above all, provide the time to play, both with you and on their own. Make sure they have the opportunity to try things out, and don't force them! All this activity needs to be fun, so take them to the park, and play on the climbing frames, slides and other equipment. Set time aside every day, and get outside to play whenever you can.

#### Two things to remember

**Safety first: Always take a look at the area where children play to make sure that it is safe. Stay close by and actively supervise children. This means paying close attention to what they are doing and anticipating risks.**

**Be creative: The ideas here, and the equipment mentioned, are just examples. Make up games with the child, and have fun together.**

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