

Physical Development

It is important for your child to be physically active and to eat well. Children learn through their bodies. Every time they move, their brains build connections. Young children need lots of physical activity to develop their balance, posture and coordination. These are the foundations that will help your child to be physically ready to sit still and concentrate.

Physical activity encourages the development of hand eye coordination for reading and writing.

When your child is active, they are learning about their bodies and what they can do. They are also learning about social rules and managing their feelings.

(What to expect in the Early Years Foundation Stage: a guide for parents, 2021)



Physical activity is vital in children's all-round development, enabling them to pursue happy, healthy and active lives. Gross and fine motor experiences develop incrementally throughout early childhood, starting with sensory explorations and the development of a child's strength, co-ordination and positional awareness through tummy time, crawling and play movement with both objects and adults. By creating games and providing opportunities for play both indoors and outdoors, adults can support

children to develop their core strength, stability, balance, spatial awareness, co-ordination and agility. **Gross motor skills** provide the foundation for developing healthy bodies and social and emotional well-being. **Fine motor control** and precision helps with hand-eye co-ordination, which is later linked to early literacy. Repeated and varied opportunities to explore and play with small world activities, puzzles, arts and crafts and the practice of using small tools, with feedback and support from adults, allow children to develop proficiency, control and confidence.

(Department for Education, 2021)

It is important that children are provided with lots of opportunities to move and be physically active so they can develop their brain structure, learn more and have fun. Tummy time, rolling, crawling, running, skipping and jumping, along with a variety of other movement activities, help to build the brain during the first years of a child's life. The NHS has produced useful guidelines on the importance of physical activity for children (under five years).

NHS Physical activity guidelines for children (under 5 years)

Being physically active every day is important for the healthy growth and development of babies, toddlers and preschoolers.

For this age group, activity of any intensity should be encouraged, including light activity and more energetic physical activity.

Babies (under 1 year)

Babies should be encouraged to be active throughout the day, every day in a variety of ways, including crawling. If they're not yet crawling, encourage them to be physically active by reaching and grasping, pulling and pushing, moving their head, body and limbs during daily routines, and during supervised floor play.

Try to include at least 30 minutes of tummy time spread throughout the day when they're awake.

Once babies can move around, encourage them to be as active as possible in a safe and supervised play environment.



Toddlers (aged 1 to 2)

Toddlers should be physically active every day for at least 180 minutes (3 hours). The more the better. This should be spread throughout the day, including playing outdoors.

The 180 minutes can include light activity such as standing up, moving around, rolling and playing, as well as more energetic activity like skipping, hopping, running and jumping.

Active play, such as using a climbing frame, riding a bike, playing in water, chasing games and ball games, is the best way for this age group to get moving.

Pre-schoolers (aged 3 to 4)

Pre-schoolers should spend at least 180 minutes (3 hours) a day doing a variety of physical activities spread throughout the day, including active and outdoor play. The more the better.

The 180 minutes should include at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity.

Children under 5 should not be inactive for long periods, except when they're asleep. Watching TV, travelling by car, bus or train, or being strapped into a buggy for long periods are not good for a child's health and development.

All children under 5 who are overweight can improve their health by meeting the activity guidelines, even if their weight does not change. To achieve and maintain a healthy weight, they may need to do additional activity and make dietary changes.



Physical activity ideas for under 5s

All movement counts. The more the better.



- tummy time
- playing with blocks and other objects
- messy play
- jumping
- walking
- dancing
- swimming
- playground activities

- climbing
- active play, like hide and seek
- throwing and catching
- scooting
- riding a bike
- outdoor activities
- skipping



Fine motor skills involve small muscles working with the brain and nervous system to control movements in areas such as the hands, fingers, lips, tongue and eyes.

Developing fine motor skills helps children do things like eating, writing, manipulating objects and getting dressed.

Research shows that the development of fine motor skills depends on the development of gross motor skills and that a joined-up approach to physical development is important. Young children need many opportunities to develop fine motor skills alongside gross motor skills so they can become confident to explore the world around them. (Gov.uk, 2022)

Some ways that you can help me with my Physical Development – from birth to 3

- Put me on my tummy or back, on a soft mat or blanket so I can kick my legs and roll.
- Let me sit on you, climb over you, and rock, bounce or sway with you.
- Give me lots of opportunities to be active outdoors in all weathers!
- Give me lots of different things to grasp, hold, squeeze and explore, like finger paint, playdough, spoons, brushes, shells.
- Let me try to put my shoes on.
- Play ball games with me.



Some ways that you can help me with my Physical Development – for 3 and 4 year-olds

- Help me with dressing but let me do the last steps, e.g. pulling up my zip after you have started it off.
- Give me lots of opportunities to be active and practise running, jumping, balancing, climbing and swinging.
- Encourage me to walk, scoot or bike to my nursery or childminder.

Some ways that you can help me with my Physical Development – for 4 and 5 year-olds

- Give me time and space to be highly active and get out of breath every day.
- Encourage me to crawl on all fours, climb, pull myself up on a rope and hang on monkey bars. These activities will help me develop the strength I need for writing.
- Let me use one-handed tools like peelers and knives.



(Taken from: What to expect in the Early Years Foundation Stage: a guide for parents)

More physical activity ideas (gross and fine motor) for different ages

- Encourage and provide tummy time for your baby and provide lots of safe and interesting items for them to explore. For example, create tummy time sensory hoops using hula hoops with a range of sensory resources attached, like as ribbons, scarfs, wooden and metal curtain rings. Lie your baby inside the hoops on their tummy so they can reach, stretch and explore the attached resources.



- Create a sensory obstacle course for your baby to explore. Create sensory spots for your child to move along using resources such as bubble wrap, sponge, carpet squares and fine sandpaper, securing these to the floor or wall with tape.



- Attach soft surface mirrors, small teddies and ribbons on the inside of a soft tunnel or under a canopy, such as an empty cardboard box. Encourage your baby to reach for the mirrors and other objects.
- Secure cardboard kitchen roll tubes to the wall at different heights and angles and provide soft balls or pom poms for your baby to reach and roll through the tubes.
- Get your child to run on the spot as fast as they can and when you shout 'stop,' they have to stop and when you shout 'go,' they have to go again. The more they practise, the quicker they will get.
- Soak some sponges in water outdoors and throw these at a chalked target on the wall or floor.
- Save bubble wrap from parcel deliveries and let your child jump on it to pop the bubbles.



- Provide objects of different size and weight which your child can safely pick up and explore so they begin to learn how much strength they need to pick up and coordinate movements safely.
- Create simple homemade obstacle courses indoors and outside, including things they can weave in and out of.



- **Skittles**

Bowling is good for motor skills, hand-eye coordination and timing. Use plastic bottles to set up skittles in a mini bowling alley in your living room. Encourage your child to carefully roll the ball to knock down all the skittles. Repeat this until all the skittles have been knocked over!

Encourage your child to take a few steps back so they are further away from the skittles and then try to knock them down.

- **Roll-a-ball**

Moving a ball, especially rolling it, involves lots of movement and co-ordination skills.

Sit comfortably with your child facing you, putting both your legs out in a V shape to make the goals.

Show your child how to score a goal by rolling the ball in between each other's legs - encourage them to do the same.

Make it harder by sitting further away from each other. If that's not hard enough, close and open your legs slowly and quickly to see if you can still score a goal!

When your child has practised rolling, try using a smaller ball and make your goal narrower to challenge their co-ordination skills.

Got the hang of a smaller ball and goal? Sit yourself and your child further away from each other to create even more distance for rolling.

Encourage your child to use their tummy muscles to sit up straight in their rolling position.



- **Yoga Pups**

Stretching the body improves blood circulation, muscle tone and will help you and your child feel great!

Imagine you are in a natural world by creating the space in your home. Explain to your child that humans have to pretend to be animals in this world!

Use your body to stretch out and imitate the animals you find there; stretch backs like a cat, go on all fours like a dog and spread arms like a magical flying tiger!

Add more moves to your yoga session, like the starfish (legs and arms stretched into a star) and the flamingo (balanced on one leg with the other leg bent).

Finish your yoga session with a short meditation - invite your child to sit together with you for a couple of minutes, with eyes closed and focusing on long, slow breathing.

Encourage your child to think about which part of their body is being stretched in each position.

To help your child develop the ability to move their fingers individually:

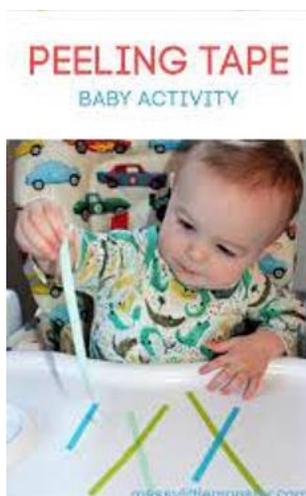
- Fill and secure plastic zip bags with different sensory resources which your baby can move around and explore. Ideas could include paint, pom poms, dried or cooked pasta, hair gel and ice.
- Save bubble wrap from parcel deliveries and let your child pop the bubbles with their fingers.



- Give your child some string or pipe cleaners with items for them to thread such as pasta tubes/shapes, 'Cheerios' cereals etc. Or items with holes such as colanders and things to thread through the holes e.g. pipe cleaners. These activities are good for your child's hand-eye coordination.



- To help your child develop a good pincer grip, which enables them to pick up small items using the thumb and index finger, and will help them to later control a pencil, give them activities such as peeling stickers off a sheet, playing with clothes pegs, picking up small items with tongs and tweezers



- To build up strength in your child's hands, give them items such as jars/pots with lids to screw/unscrew, large and small nuts and bolts, padlocks and keys etc.



More ideas for developing fine motor skills



Pine Cone & Elastic Band
fine motor activity



SCOOP & TRANSFER
a fun little toddler activity

