



DANISH HEALTH
AUTHORITY



Encourage your
child to play
actively and be
physically active

2017

Physical activity strengthens your child's motor skills

Children 0–4 years old are physically active in spontaneous ways, and this activity bolsters their motor development. They use their body to explore their immediate environment and to establish social contact with other people. They learn about their own bodies through physical activity. Giving children opportunities to be as physically active as possible in daily life is therefore crucial.

The more often your child challenges her motor skills and moves in various ways, the greater the chance that she obtains experience with various types of movement that she can integrate and use for new movements. Ensuring that your child has enough challenging and diverse opportunities for movement in his daily life is therefore important so that he learns many types of movements.



Good motor skills are important for children



A child who has good motor skills has greater opportunities to positively experience her body and what it can accomplish. Good motor skills give the child better prerequisites for playing actively with other children, and this improves his prerequisites to perform movements. In addition, having positive experiences in using their body improves children's opportunities for physical activity later in life.

Learning how to carry out small and large movements

Children differ greatly in what they can do with their bodies depending on how old they are. Infants learn to lift and hold up their head and turn it from side to side and to control their shoulders and upper body. Then they gradually learn large movements such as rolling over from being on their stomach to being on their back and then sitting up on their rump and then crawling. The first small movements start by grasping things such as a rattle, pacifier and spoon. Later the child strives to pick things up with her fingers, such as toys and food on a plate.

Integrate motor development and movement into your daily lives

When the child can walk, you can use trips to and from a childcare centre or other destination to master various movements. Examples include walking, jumping and running on a sidewalk, jumping down from rocks or stairs and walking balanced on a narrow kerbstone. In everyday life, the child can use other daily activities to challenge his motor skills and learn how to carry out various movements. In supermarkets, he can push a small shopping cart. At home, your child can help out with vacuuming, tidying up and meal-related tasks such as rinsing vegetables and fruit, setting the table and others.



Let the child do things herself

Parents with busy lives may end up helping children more than the children need. Your child can do many things herself if she is given space and time; this helps her to learn new movements herself and increasingly control her body. For example, your child can walk next to a stroller or baby carriage, use a balance cycle and get dressed and undressed.

Physical activity for children 0–4 years old includes all types of movements focusing on interaction and play

Be aware of safety when children are on the move



Infants younger than 1 year old

Recommendation

✓ Maximize floor-based tummy time for infants when they are awake

When infants lie on their stomachs, they strengthen their back and arm muscles so that they eventually can push themselves up using their arms, roll and crawl.

Infants can lie on their tummy on the floor, on the arm of an adult or on a bed. A floor or other flat surface is the best place to play.

How?

0-6 months old

Roll your child around onto his tummy and let him lie there as long as possible every time you change his diaper and when you play on the floor.

6-12 months old

Place toys in a circle around your child so she is motivated to reach for them or get to them by pushing herself forward or crawling.

Another reason to place children on their tummy is that this enables them to strengthen their neck, throat and shoulder muscles so that they can carry out the first major motor challenge for infants: to lift and hold up their head.

You can make it pleasant and fun for your child to lie on his tummy by lying on the floor together with him or putting out toys he can look at. You can also let your child look at herself in a mirror. This can produce smiles and joy and stimulate her desire to lie on her tummy.



Recommendation

✓ Ensure that infants are physically active in various ways during the day
Infants learn about their bodies by trying out new and varying movements, such as reaching for, grasping, pulling and pushing objects.

How?

0-6 months old

- Change, play with and talk with your child from both the left and right sides.
- Bend and stretch children's arms and legs many times each day.
- Hang toys over children that they can grasp and reach for.
- Move the toys around in the living-room so that your child can orient herself spatially.
 - Roll back and forth.
- Help children pull themselves up from lying down to sitting.

6-12 months old

- Cross your child's arms and legs over the middle of his body.
- Let your child use you to steady herself when she wants to stand up; remember to let her do the work, even though it is tempting to help.
 - Let children eat and drink themselves; place their chair so their arms can rest on the table.
- Let children serve themselves and play with the utensils while eating.

Recommendation

✓ Ensure that infants can move freely as much as possible
Avoid placing infants in baby bouncers, car seats and highchairs any longer than necessary. Infants achieve better motor development when they can move freely.

How?

0-6 months old

- Children should only be placed in a car seat for trips in a car. Infants should not be left in the same position for a long time in which they have difficulty moving.
 - Allow children to stretch, explore their fingers and toes and objects nearby, such as when they are lying on the floor or in a bed.
- Let children experience movement in water in a swimming pool or in a large bathtub together with a parent.

6-12 months old

- Children should only be placed in a car seat for trips in a car. Infants should not be left in the same position for a long time in which they have difficulty moving.
- Avoid having your child sitting a highchair between meals. Support children in getting up on all fours, in crawling, in sitting and in standing up.
 - Children learn through their body. Give children secure physical settings in which they can develop and challenge their gross and fine motor skills.

How?



6–12 months old

- Choose toys that help children to use their body and that encourage them to stretch towards, reach for and crawl towards and over the toys. Many items already in the home can be used as toys, such as boxes, newspapers, magazines, spoons, balls, beanies and shoes.
- Ensure that the objects used as toys are large enough that children cannot choke on them when they explore the objects and thereby put them in their mouths.

Inspiration for activities

- Get children to reach for toys by placing them just out of reach.
- Play pushing and pulling games with balls and toys that are nice to touch.
- Play accompanied by music to promote playful movements.
- Play repetition games such as patty-cake, waving bye-bye and peek-a-boo.
- Tumbling play in which the child is swung, rolls, is helped to do somersaults or jumps.
- Baby swimming and rhythmic gymnastics for infants.



Children 1–4 years old

Recommendation

- ✓ Ensure that children are physically active in various ways during the day

Children improve their motor skills by carrying out new varying movements. Being able to master their bodies is satisfying for children, and this improves their prerequisites for engaging in active play with other children.



How?

- Be aware that your child makes various movements during the day, including running, jumping, throwing, catching, pulling, pushing, turning around and raising and lowering their head.
- Note whether your child is not carrying out specific types of movements, such as climbing, hopping, running, jumping or throwing. Try to support him in carrying out these movements.
- Encourage your child to get used to being somewhat out of breath. Especially older children may note that their heart rate is elevated and that they are breathing more rapidly.
- Challenging children's motor ability can be a good way of supporting their motor development. Children can often achieve more than expected if they get space and support to do this. They can often succeed in carrying out activities they did not think would be possible if they get appropriate support, and this can provide an invaluable experience for them. Examples include jumping down from a height children initially think is too high or hopping between two stones when they initially think that the distance is too great.



Recommendation

✓ Ensure that children can move freely as much as possible

Avoid placing children in highchairs or strollers any longer than necessary. Children achieve better motor development when they can move freely.

How?

- Let children walk as much as possible next to the stroller or baby carriage until they are too tired to walk. This may take more time and require parental patience to let children walk instead of placing them in a stroller, but it helps children's motor skills and the feeling of being able to do things themselves.
- Walk with your child, encourage her to use a balance cycle, use a scooter, run races and play tag. Keep safety in mind to avoid accidents.





Recommendation

✓ Limit the amount of screen time

Screen time can adversely affect children's well-being. Although children may need or want sedentary activity on occasions, it is important that they move as much as possible during the day.

💡 Inspiration for activities

The following activities are alternatives to screen time.

- Preparing meals, focusing the children on simple tasks such as setting the table, rinsing vegetables, helping to stir dough and making rolls.
- Relaxing to music on a mat on the floor. Children can lie in various positions, such as arms close to the body, arms pointing left and right and then over the head, rolling together in a ball or stretching.
- Gentle massage in which you take turns massaging each other.
- Reading aloud, singing songs and musical games.
- Have your child lie on his back and watch the clouds. Give the clouds names based on their appearance, such as the names of animals or fantasy names.
- Other types of calm play such as with blocks or building sets, painting, drawing or jigsaw puzzles.

rolling crawling rocking jumping walking



Inspiration for movement

Rolling, crawling, rocking, jumping, walking, grasping, spinning, pulling, pushing, balancing, climbing, swinging, running, skipping, throwing, hopping, stomping, catching.

How?

Choose toys that encourage movement and help to develop such skills as running, kicking, throwing and catching. The toys can include balls, bats, racquets, tricycles and kites.

pushing balancing climbing throwing skipping running swinging



crawling rocking jumping walking pulling



Inspiration for activities

- Let your child draw, cut with scissors and string beads.
- Play with balls of different sizes.
- Play with balloons. Hit and push them and try to keep them from hitting the ground.
- Blow soap bubbles and try to catch them.
- Carry out activities in nature in which children hop, run and walk and stand on various surfaces such as grass, gravel, asphalt or sand.
- Go to a playground, where children can climb, swing and play with sand.
- Walk to destinations instead of driving, taking a bus or using a stroller or baby carriage.
- Go on a discovery voyage or field trip in the neighbourhood.
- Dance to music or play musical games.
- Play tag games, play kick the can, set up an obstacle course or play Simon says.
- Encourage children to help set the table, tidy up, sweep and carry out other tasks in the home.
- Tumbling games with adults in which the child is swung, rolled etc.
- Use a balance cycle, cycle with pedals or scooter or walk.
- Swimming.
- Gymnastics and rhythmic gymnastics.





walking grasping spinning pulling swinging climbing balancing pushing running skipping throwing hopping stomping catching rolling crawling rocking

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