



48 months *to* 60 months

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

How are children becoming skillful at moving their bodies?

OVERVIEW

- Physical development and physical activity play an important role in health throughout a child's life span. In particular, being physically active protects against heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. It also contributes to mental health, happiness and psychological well-being.
- Physical movement skills are a basis for other types of learning and allow opportunities for children to engage with others, to explore, to learn, and to play.
- Physical activity prepares children for activities in later life, including fitness activities, organized sports, and recreation.
- Infants, toddlers and preschool children are developmentally ready and very motivated to learn new movement skills. The preschool period is an opportune time for young children to learn fundamental movement skills. If children do not learn those skills during the preschool period, they may have difficulty learning them later, and their ability to participate in physical activities may be affected for the long term.
- During the preschool years, children develop important movement skills. Those skills build on the physical development that happened for children in infancy and toddlerhood.
- We now know how much children learn through physical activity outdoors in the natural world. It is important for adults to help children have opportunities for this kind of play, as many children spend a majority of their time in front of a television or computer screen instead of engaged in physical activity.
- The more experience children have with physical activities, the more confidence they develop and the more willing they are to try new things and develop new skills. Children who spend a lot of time in front of the television or the computer may be less willing to try new physical challenges and may miss the chance to develop important physical skills.



- Research highlights the benefits of experiencing nature for children and shows that children prefer spending time in natural settings. Further, we also know that access to green, outdoor spaces improves children's thinking skills and their well-being and relationships.

Some of the things you might see with five-year-old children:

- Showing a developed sense of balance.
- Maintaining balance while standing on one foot for several seconds.
- Maintaining balance when they come to a stop after running.
- Balancing a bean bag on top of their head.
- Walking forward and backward, “balancing” on a wide line pattern on the rug.
- Walking along a zigzag pattern on the rug.
- Walking down steps using alternating feet without holding railing.
- Balancing while walking on the edge of the sandbox.
- Playing a game of “freeze”—moving in different ways and stopping, holding the last position for a few seconds.
- Balancing a bean bag on the head or different parts of the body while walking along a straight line.
- Running and stopping with control at a desired spot.
- Running lightly on toes.
- Running, sometimes moving around obstacles without falling.
- Jumping over a block using both feet.
- Jumping forward 3 feet, using both feet together.
- Galloping (running, leading with one foot) in a rhythmic way.
- Hopping on one foot for several feet and changing direction to land on different targets.



Tips for families to support preschooler physical development:

- Preschoolers need lots of opportunities to move, to run, to climb, to jump, to build and to throw. They enjoy carrying heavy things and building with blocks and other natural materials. Children often put a lot of physical energy into their play. Most are naturally motivated to try new physical challenges and practice new skills.

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- Preschoolers love to transport things. They like to carry things and to push things in carts, boxes or trucks. They also enjoy carrying things, such as baskets or purses with handles that they can use to fill and carry— recycled water bottles, or other things they find.
- Preschoolers love to build, stacking things as high as they can and creating houses, roads, buildings, zoos, stores, bridges and other structures they can use for pretend play. They will do this with almost anything they can find— cans and boxes from the cupboard, sticks and leaves from outside, small scraps of wood from the lumber store, several large cardboard boxes, or sets of building blocks or snap together blocks.
- Preschoolers also love to climb and some will climb on anything they can find (chairs, tables, shelves, couches, benches).
 - Decide what is safe for your child to climb on and remind them to climb there when they start climbing on other things.
 - You can also use mattresses, cushions and low platforms for children to climb on and use in building forts.
 - Outdoor playgrounds provide opportunities for climbing for children, as do natural areas with logs, boulders and hills. You and your child can explore your neighborhood for appropriate climbing places.
 - Children will sometimes fall when they are climbing, and most of the time they catch themselves and only get small scratches. These simple falls are also how they learn. They often want to go back to the same spot to try climbing again and will do it successfully because of what they learned the previous time.



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- When your child begins to climb, it is important that you look around the area to see if it is a safe environment.
- Preschoolers enjoy being outside. Even short walks outside give children a chance to try out different surfaces for walking, running, galloping, hopping and jumping, and to watch the seasons and experience what the community has to offer.
- Preschoolers enjoy challenges. If you are walking on the sidewalk, you might want to set different goals for them. “Can you run to the big tree? Can you hop all the way to the corner? Can you hop for 3 steps and walk for 3 steps and hop for 3 again? Shall we try walking backward for a few steps, walking forward a few steps and then walking backward again? Can you walk on the line down the center of the sidewalk? Can you walk on this squiggly crack in the sidewalk?”
- Children at this age also enjoy throwing. You can provide a variety of soft balls that they can throw. They may also be interested in beginning to hit balls with things like bats, sticks, or cardboard tubes.
- Preschoolers also like to stretch their muscles by carrying or moving heavy things. A sealed bottle or box of laundry detergent would be fun for them to carry inside for you. They enjoy carrying small stools around so they can reach a book off the shelf. They can help bring in the groceries or push the laundry basket to the table for folding. Helping you with “grown-up” work gives children opportunities to develop their physical skills and also to develop their emotional and social skills.

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- Children around the age of 5 love wheel toys, small tricycles and bikes, wagons, carts and trucks, all of which provide ways for them to use their physical skills and also can be part of their pretend play.

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