

Gross motor skills



Gross motor skills are required for whole body movement and use the large muscles of the body (belly, back, arms and legs). Gross motor skills are needed to perform everyday tasks like walking, running, jumping and sitting at the table.

Gross motor skills can include:

Balance and coordination

Balance is the ability to keep control of body positions when doing tasks or activities. Balance is needed to sit at a table, walk the balance beam or step up onto a kerb. We might need to keep balanced when holding a position ('freeze' games) or when we are moving (running or riding a bike). Coordination is the ability to use different parts of the body together, at the same time.

A child with balance and coordination difficulties may fall or trip easily, move stiffly, avoid physical activity, or be slower to develop physical skills like riding a bike or throwing and catching a ball.

Good balance and coordination allow our body movements to be smooth, and help us to do everyday tasks as well as play sports. Balance and coordination also mean we have good posture when we write or cut at the table.

Posture

Poor posture can be seen when we are sitting and standing. Typically, children will slouch or adopt positions that don't require much muscle activity. Good posture helps to strengthen our core, straighten our spine and sit, stand or walk well.

Strength and endurance

Muscular strength is the ability to push against resistance. There may or may not be movement of the body when pushing. For example, carrying something in front of the body requires strength, but there is no movement of the arms. Muscular endurance is the ability to keep applying strength or force for an extended period.

Strength and endurance allow children to complete activities like carrying their school bag, running, climbing and maintaining good posture throughout the day. Good strength and endurance usually mean children develop stronger muscles, ligaments and tendons and reduce their risk of injury.



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Agility and running

Agility is the ability to change directions and speed up or slow down without losing control of their body movement. Agility is directly related to speed, balance, strength and coordination skills.

Children develop speed and agility at an early age, when they chase their family or pets around. By the age of three, children usually run but will lack control. However, at the age of four to five, a child has more control when running and can start, stop and turn.

Activities you can try at home:

Balance games: Practise walking on uneven surfaces or along a line on the ground. You can do this with tape on the floor or a crack in the footpath.

Ball games: Kicking, throwing, bouncing and catching a ball are all great for developing coordination skills.

Floor games: Play games, read books or complete puzzles while asking your child to lie on their tummy on the floor. This helps improve core strength and posture.

Jumping games: These help build leg strength. Try hopscotch or 'follow the leader' with jumping and hopping.

Running: Practise running and chasing things and incorporate dodging and change of direction to improve agility.

Riding a bike: Riding a bike or tri-cycle support your child's coordination and balance, and build their leg strength.

Playing on playgrounds: Climbing, jumping, pulling, pushing or crawling are all beneficial skills that can be performed when playing on the playground.