



## **Developing gross motor skills at home**

### *What is it?*

Gross motor skills are those which involve the large muscles in the human body and are thus responsible for the movement of the whole body while performing functions like sitting upright, standing, walking, all kinds of sport activities (jumping, running, rolling over, ball skills, swimming, riding a bicycle or a scooter, etc).

### *Why is it important?*

Mastering gross motor skills becomes a base for mastering fine motor skills. Only after a child is able to sit upright can they hold cutlery to eat, hold a pen or pencil to write or draw, hold a brush to paint and so on. These, on the other hand, become the basics for acquiring academic knowledge. Gross motor skills make it possible for a person to interact with the environment and to navigate through it.

### *What if it is neglected?*

Gross motor skills are of utmost importance to a toddler. With underdeveloped gross motor skills, they would not be able to move freely around the environment, without causing accidents with themselves and others.

### *What to expect?*

It is important to have realistic expectations. We cannot expect a one-year-old who has just started walking, to be able also to jump. Nevertheless, we must keep track on the child's development and support them in the areas that appear to be difficult for them to master. I have found a nice chart on the Internet with milestones in the development of gross motor skills from birth to 6 years.

<https://therapiesforkids.com.au/gross-motor-milestones/>

### *How to support?*

Practice makes perfect. It is important for a toddler to have a lot of practice every day in accordance with their age and level of development. For the smaller ones, who still find it a bit hard to keep their balance, even walking is quite nice exercise. When a child is able to walk, they must walk. They don't need to be carried anymore or pushed in prams. They just need adults to comply their speed with them so that they can have enough time and space to do this important exercise with pleasure. Older toddler will be able to run and jump, to throw and catch a ball, to balance on a beam, to walk backwards... Nevertheless, they are still small and sometimes they need adults to play with them so



that they can develop fully their abilities. They have a lot of energy and they need various games to exhaust it and thus to develop their motor skills.

### *What are the challenges?*

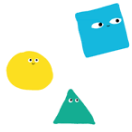
Going out for a walk with a toddler, is much different than going out for a walk (without a toddler). A toddler has the strength and ability to walk a really long distance but they are not able just to reach from point A to point B. They will walk slowly at times, they will run at times, they will stop to explore a leaf or a flower, they will collect rocks and chestnuts, they will stop to watch a bug, they will chase a butterfly... It will take 2 to 3 times longer time to reach your destination than it would normally take.

### *What do you need?*

- **Patience** to go with their pace.
- **Wisdom** do give them time and space to explore the world.
- **Energy** to play with them.
- **Love** to manage to remind yourself that you need to do the best for your child.

### **Activities to try with toddlers at home to develop their gross motor skills:**

1. Throwing small balls or soft toys into a laundry basket – this will build the child's upper body strength. Other benefits are the development of the eye-hand coordination and, in case you play it together as a game – a Grace and courtesy exercise – taking turns.
2. Dancing and moving games – toddlers love music and most of them love dancing as well. Moving games and songs are great for developing all muscle groups and have another benefit as well – following a certain sequence of actions. Free dance is also nice because it allows for free movement.
3. Bowling – even if you don't have a bowling game at home, all you need is a few empty plastic bottles (of milk, for example) and a small ball. For an older toddler you can pour a bit of water in each bottle to make it a bit heavier and therefore harder to bring down. This would also develop the upper body and, if played together, teach to take turns.
4. Imitating animals – this one is mostly achievable for older toddlers because they are able to play games requiring imagination but younger also love to imitate so don't neglect the game and just give it a try to see if it will be fun for your little one. It is simple – you can start by choosing an animal, for example a bird, and then act like a bird – pretend to fly around the room, spreading hands and moving them up and down. After that is the child's turn to do it. For a younger toddler choosing another animal would be hard but for an older toddler it might be fun.



<http://montessoriandilek.cz/>

Tell them that now it is their turn to choose and imitate an animal and you will repeat. This develops the whole body.

5. Soap bubbles – yes, you can do it at home as well, if you have a proper area for it. It requires some space and easy to clean floor. Toddlers enjoy bubbles enormously and they will love running, jumping and clapping to catch them. It allows movement of the whole body.
6. Routines – you can include all pieces of furniture in creating a sport routine or even just an exercise. Toddlers can crawl under a table/dining chair/desk, climb on an arm-chair/bed, jump off the arm-chair/bed, walk/jump on sofa pillows placed on the floor, balance on a stable low bench, roll on a carpet, etc. Anything could do, just place the pieces of furniture in a way that would suppose following a certain circular route, bringing them to the beginning again, so they can repeat as many times as they want. For younger toddlers it could be much simpler – including only walking, climbing up and down and walking over objects.
7. Throw and catch – ball games are not quite suitable for inside but the good thing is that you can throw and catch a soft toy as well, just be sure to choose a proper size and shape.

By all means, try to engage your toddler in as much movement as possible.