Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Gross Motor Skills Advice & Activity Idea's 3yrs+

Children's Occupational Therapy
What are Motor Skills?

This pack mainly focuses on Gross motor skills but it is important to have an awareness about both motor skills.

Motor skills are part of your child's everyday life, and are the basic movement skills that allow us to do the things we want and need to do throughout the day. They allow us to do everything from walking down the stairs to playing our favourite sport and without them we simply could not function. Motor skills can be separated into gross motor skills and fine motor skills.

Gross Motor skills use the large muscle groups, which work together to produce actions such as rolling over, walking, running, jumping, catching and throwing. Children need a good deal of strength, control, balance and whole body co-ordination for good gross motor skill action.

Fine Motor skills use only the smaller body parts, such as the hands and fingers. These include skills such as using cutlery, writing, using scissors, fastening buttons and manipulating toys.

In young children, gross movements develop first, and these relate to the early developmental milestones of rolling, sitting, crawling and walking. As gross motor skills improve and allow children to walk around and explore their environments fine motor skills then begin to form as children play and explore toys, games and tools.

Regardless of what type of motor skill it may be, children need to experience movement in order to learn about themselves, and how they fit into the environment around them. To move well, a child must be able to:

- Know where all the parts of their body are.
- Control the body as it moves.
- Co-ordinate the different parts of their body so that movement is smooth.
- Judge the amount of force, strength, and speed needed.
- Understand directions – up/ down, back/ front, left/ right, top/ bottom etc.
- Appreciate the rhythm and timing of movements.
- Make safety decisions about when to move, and where to move too.
- Be able to stay still.

How can we help motor skill development?

The answer to that question……is practice practice practice. Children develop, strengthen and master their motor skills through everyday activity, whether at home, school or playing with others but some children may require increased adult support to build on and develop these.

When encouraging a child to develop or build on a skill, we must ensure the activity is **Just right**. Just right activity refers to providing a child with an activity that is aimed at their current level of ability or function so provides them with a challenge that is achievable. If we provide them with a task that is too difficult, the child will become upset, frustrated and disengage with the task altogether. If we provide them with an activity that is slightly more challenging that the first and gradually increase the motor planning needs or difficulty, then we are encouraging the child to develop that skill in manner that maximises the chances of success and increases confidence and engagement.

What are the skills we are working on?

As previously discussed, gross motor skills are made up of a number of different aspects such as timing, sequencing and body awareness to name a few. It is these skills that the gross motor activity section of this motor skill pack are designed to target and therefore it's important we know what these skills actually are.

Skill	What it means
Motor Planning (Praxis)	Motor planning (often referred to as praxis) is the ability to conceive, plan, and carry out a skilled, unfamiliar motor act in the correct sequence from beginning to end. Children who struggle with this will often appear slow to act or undertake tasks in an incorrect sequence
Sequencing & Timing	The brains ability to put the step-by-step movements in the correct order and with the correct timing to complete the task both successfully and efficiently.
Hand eye co-ordination	The skill that enables the eyes to guide the hands in accurate movement. Catching a ball for example requires skilled hand eye co-ordination
Bilateral integration	The ability to coordinate both sides of the body at the same time in a controlled and organized manner; for example, stabilizing and turning the paper with one hand while operating scissors in the other.
Body and Limb Awareness	The internal understanding of where the body is in space without the need for vision. For example, how high to lift your leg when climbing stairs or fastening that top button on your shirt you cannot see.
Postural control (Balance)	The ability to stabilize and control our trunk in all manner of condition to allow for normal functions in stationary position or in movement, such as sitting, standing, or walking.
Isolation of movement	The ability to move one or part of a limb whilst stabilizing and fixing the others. For example when we carry a drink from room to room, we fix our arm and hand but move our legs trunk and shoulder to prevent spilling it.
Spatial Awareness	Spatial awareness (not to be confused with body awareness) is the ability to be aware of oneself in relation to objects within the environment. When running to catch a ball for example, spatial awareness allows us to move past or around objects and thus prevent crashing into things. Children with this difficulty often bump or trip over themselves or everyday objects.
Grading of Force/power	How much force to use and when to apply it or alter it in an activity such as throwing force or pulling force.

How does this pack work and how can I use it?

The following activities have been put together to support the development of the skills discussed in the table above. By completing these activities, we are working on the core and transferable abilities required for gross motor skills. This activities list should not be viewed as comprehensive however and should serve only as ideas for improving motor skills. It is also important to understand that children are individual, therefore don't be afraid to adapt or be creative with these activities to meet your child's interests and encourage engagement and challenge.

How often should these activities be completed?

Improving Motor skills takes time and practice; there are no quick fixes and therefore activities such as these provided should be used as long as you feel necessary. In order to get the best out of these activities however, we recommend focusing on no more than 5 activities a week, and completing these daily (aiming for 20 mins + per day) with the aim of challenging your child to improve on their score/outcome each time and in turn practice and improve on their skills.

Activity	Description	Skills Worked On
Simon Says	Play this game with eyes open to start with and eyes closed when your child becomes more skilled. Make sure you use left and right such as "touch your nose with the right hand and your knee with your left hand" to encourage good use of right and left etc. Visual demonstrations can be used to start with.	Body and limb awareness Core/Postural Stability Hand-eye co-ordination Isolation of movement Bilateral integration Motor planning
Angels in the Snow	Child lying on their back on the floor. Ask the child to move arms and legs out to their side whilst maintaining contact with the floor at all times (just like snow angels without the snow). Start with one limb commands such as "move your left arm", then increase the difficulty with "move your left arm and your right leg". Child must move the limbs together and at the same speed.	Body and limb awareness Core/Postural Stability Isolation of movement Hand-eye Co-ordination Timing of movement Bilateral integration Motor Planning
Drawing on Back	Draw shapes, letters or objects on your child's back using your finger tip and encourage them to tell you what you drew.	Sensory feedback Body and limb awareness
Static Wheelbarrow	Child forms a wheelbarrow position (straight arms) with their legs (from the hip downwards) supported on a chair, stool or gym ball. Count how long the child can maintain that position (up to 30 seconds) and if child improves try one arm only or encourage them to slowly lower their shoulders to the floor and come back up (like a press-up but with legs supported on object)	Core/Postural stability Shoulder strength Motor planning
Arm Wrestling	Rather than competing against the child, in the arm wrestle position encourage the child to push against you whilst you provide resistance	Shoulder strength and stability Core/Postural stability
Tug of War	Can be done either sitting, standing or kneeling using rope or a twisted towel.	Core/Postural stability Shoulder strength and stability
Superman	Child comes onto all fours. On instruction, child reaches forward with one arm and holds this for 20 seconds. Next child holds out one leg for 20 seconds, then one arm and one leg together for 20 seconds and so on. Use the terms left and right to encourage motor planning.	Core/Postural stability Shoulder strength and stability Motor Planning Bilateral integration
Ball Rolling	Child lies on their front keeping their legs straight behind them. Child then raises their head and chest off the floor. Roll the ball to the child; they must then roll it back. See how many they can do in 30 seconds. Encourage the child not to use their arms to help keep their chest up.	Core/Postural stability Shoulder strength and stability Timing Bilateral integration
Bridging	Great activity for core strength. Child lies on the floor and bends their knees bringing their ankles close their bottom. Hands go across the chest and the child must lift their bottom off the floor and bring their tummy as high as they can, holding this for 10 seconds. Increase the time to make it more challenging.	Core/Postural stability Motor planning
Pouring activity	Child to hold small plastic jug in each hand. Child must pour liquid from one jug to another without spilling it whilst stood up. If this proves easy, child must then walk from one end of the playground or garden to the other whilst pouring the liquid from one jug to	Bilateral co-ordination Core/Postural stability Spatial awareness Grading of force/power

	another again not spilling any water. Place obstacles in their path they must walk around to increase the challenge.	Motor Planning
Egg and Spoon	Place a ball or a wooden/hardboiled egg on a large spoon. Child must hold this spoon out in front of them and walk from one end of the room or playground to the other without dropping it. If they do, ask them to start again. Don't let the child hold the spoon close their chest (must be arms straight out in front of them). If proving easy, place objects in front of them to navigate around.	Core/Postural stability Shoulder strength and stability Spatial awareness Isolation of movement Motor planning
Tennis ball Wooden spoon	Same as above except the child uses a tennis racket and ball. Harder to do as ball will often roll off the racket so child must keep hand and arm steady.	Core/Postural stability Shoulder strength and stability Spatial awareness Isolation of movement and Motor planning
Stepping stones	Make two large circles using a cereal box; these will act as the child's stepping stones. Child must use these to cross the room by placing one in front of them, stepping on it, bending over and picking up the previous one from behind them and then repeating the process until across the room. Child is to try and keep their feet together.	Core/Postural stability Motor planning
Two footed jumping	Use mats or a chalk ladder on the floor to form a jumping course. Child must then jump on each mat or square with their feet together without losing their balance. To make it harder, don't let the child pause between each jump.	Grading or force/power Motor planning Core Stability/Postural Stability
Line Walking	Use masking tape to make a line at least 10 meters long. Child must walk the line on their tip-toes. Make the line longer or add corners to negotiate to challenge child further.	Motor planning Core stability/Postural stability
Obstacle course	Make an obstacle course using furniture, balance beams, chairs, climbing frames or boxes that the child must negotiate. Make sure climbing over, under and through things is encouraged in a safe as possible manner.	Motor planning Core stability/Postural stability Spatial Awareness
Balloon keepy-ups	Child must stand in a hoop or on a mat. Then using a balloon, keep the balloon form hitting the floor by tapping it up in the air with both hands. Child cannot step outside the hoop or mat, so each keepy-up must be controlled and well directed. How many can they do before the balloon hits the floor?	Motor planning Grading of force/power Spatial awareness Hand-eye Co-ordination
Pop the bubbles	Child must pop bubbles by clasping their hands together. Blow the bubbles within easy reach first and then increase the difficulty by blowing them higher and further away to increase reach and timing of bubble floating down.	Motor Planning Timing of movement Hand-eye Co-ordination
Toss bean bags into baskets	Provide laundry baskets or hula hoops. Child must throw bean bags into the target. Move the target further away to increase the difficulty once they land 5 shots in the hoop in a row.	Motor Planning Grading of force Hand-eye Co-ordination
Roll and Move	Grab a large soft die and write a list of simple exercises on cards. Have one child draw a card (or the parent/carer to do this) whilst the child rolls the die. The die tells you how many times to do the exercise. Here are some ideas for the exercise cards:	Motor planning Hand-eye Co-ordination Spatial awareness Core/Postural stability

	• Touch your toes • Do arm circles • Run across the room • Hop on one foot • Jump forward • Take big steps or tiny steps	
Alphabet yoga	Challenge your child to do a yoga pose for various letters of the alphabet. Great warm up exercise before class. A – Airplane (hold still and move arms to the side) B – Bicycle (lie on your back and pedal your feet) C – Cat pose (get on all fours; then round your back while tucking in your chin; release) D – Donkey Kick (on all fours must kick behind them 3 times).	Body and limb awareness Core/Postural Stability Hand-eye co-ordination Isolation of movement Bilateral integration Motor planning
Skittles	Line up milk or coke bottles like skittles and encourage the child to knock them over by rolling a ball. The accuracy, power and timing of the release of the ball will be challenged. Increase the distance from the skittles to make it harder.	Body and limb awareness Core/Postural Stability Hand-eye co-ordination Isolation of movement Bilateral integration Motor planning
Throwing and catching	Use a large ball and practice some throwing and catching between you and the child. Keep distances minimal to start with and increase this to make it harder. If the child improves make the ball smaller or use a beanbag. Encourage a pendulum swing and releasing the ball at the right time.	Grading force/power Core/Postural stability Isolation of movement Timing of movement Hand-eye Co-ordination
Bounce the ball and catch it	Start with two hand catches. Use a large ball and challenge the child to hold it at waist height, bounce it off the floor and catch it again. Reward them after 10 successful catches. If this works well, for a bigger challenge bounce the ball between you and the child. Start around 3 meters apart at first and allow one bounce only.	Grading force/power Core/Postural stability Isolation of movement Timing of movement Hand-eye Co-ordination
Kicking practice	Use a light football and work on some kicking practice. This could be using a goal or setting up some skittles similar to the skittles challenge. Child should start kicking whilst stood still at first.	Grading force/power Core/Postural stability Isolation of movement Timing of movement Hand-eye Co-ordination
Crab football	Child forms the crab position (tummy facing the ceiling with hands and feet on floor). Using a football child must move towards the ball and kick it at the goal. Can bring in other peers but be careful of treading on fingers.	Grading force/power Core/Postural stability Timing of movement Hand-eye Co-ordination
Floor is Lava	Similar to the obstacle course but using house hold furniture or garden/playground equipment. Great for the whole class and encourages both motor planning and balance. Children must try not to touch the floor and get from point A to point B as safely as possible.	Motor planning Core stability/Postural stability Spatial Awareness
Dodge Ball	Great game to play as a group or with two adults. Use a larger soft ball so that the child can see it clearly. Great for spatial and body awareness	Motor planning Core stability/Postural stability

		Spatial Awareness Body and limb awareness
Big bag Toss	Have the child stand at the bottom of the stairs and give them a large number of bean bags. The child must try and throw the bean bags to so that at least one lands on each step. If this proves too hard at first, give each step a number 1 at the bottom and give them 10 beanbags. Once thrown add up the scores, the higher they get the beanbag on the step the higher the score.	Grading force/power Core/Postural stability Isolation of movement Timing of movement Hand-eye Co-ordination
Keep your head up	Place a beanbag on the child's head and get them to walk from one end of the playground, garden or room to the other without it falling off. If they do this, place some objects in their way to negotiate and step over or around. If the beanbag does fall off, ask them to put it back on and carry on. Don't ask them to restart the entire course.	Core/Postural stability Isolation of movement Spatial Awareness Body and limb awareness
What's the time Mr wolf	Classic game where adult stands at one end of the room with a paper tail on. Children ask what time is it and move forward by how many steps the wolf says. Each game, change the way the child walks such as side steps, backwards, jumping, sumo.	Motor planning Core/Postural stability Timing of movement Body and limb awareness
Statue Game	Child sits on a bench and pretends to be a statue, keeping arms and body stiff. Adult or another peer applies gentle pressure to each body part in different directions and child tries to maintain an upright posture without being pushed off.	Core/postural stability Body and limb awareness
Playing in the park	Encourage play in the park and access to swings, climbing frames, balance beams and roundabouts. If child is unsure of how to use them give them a visual demo and then some verbal instruction. Avoid physical assistance to encourage motor planning and problem solving.	Core/Postural stability Motor Planning Spatial Awareness Body and limb awareness