

Family Wellness Physical Therapy, PLLC

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Gross Motor / Physical Development in the Young Toddler

It is easy to see the differences in a one year old vs a two year old. There are a lot of things that happen in this year in all categories of development. This is the time that your child learns that he is not part of you! He is exploring the world. He is categorizing that a duck and a chicken are similar and is excited when he sees something he has seen before. He sees that things go together; Daddy has two feet and there is a shoe for each! And this is REALLY exciting to him! To navigate his world, your baby will do lots of walking, squatting and climbing! For this reason, having him explore his environment is all he needs to do.

Gross motor development includes larger body movements such as walking, climbing, kicking, and throwing. Fine motor development includes smaller body movements such as grasping an object and coloring. As a child carries on in their day all categories of development blend together. Here I will discuss gross motor development while keeping the categories of speech, language, cognition, emotional, and fine motor development in consideration.

The next 4 topics cover a variety of concerns for the 1-2 year old.

1. **Footwear** - Barefoot is always best for development of the foot and ankle because it allows for the most freedom of movement of the foot and ankle. Bones develop with the stresses of weight-bearing. The weight-bearing stresses that go through your child's feet when they get up from the floor to stand are crucial to the develop of



the bones and muscles of the foot and ankle. When your child is standing and walking he also gathers a lot of information from the sensation of his feet and ankles. This information tells his brain how to adjust his body to stay upright. A stiff shoe can inhibit these important factors in structural development and balance strategies. When barefoot is not an option, I recommend a soft leather bootie to mimic being barefoot. There are several companies who make these; Robeez and Tommy Tickle can be found easily online.

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2. Falling - Toddlers fall. They fall a lot. And it's ok. Sometimes they hurt themselves, but most times they don't. Sometimes they get upset, but most of the time they don't. This is because falling helps them learn. They are testing out how fast they can go and how far they can reach before they hit their limit. If they don't hit their limit then they will not know their full capacity. What you can do as a parent, is if the situation is safe for your child to fall, let her. Don't catch her. When she is walking, you don't need to hold her hand. She is called a toddler for a reason; she toddles. Try to adjust to her pace. She will fall, and and get right back up again.

3. "W" sitting - This position often is often chosen by children so they can widen their base of support and make sitting more easy. The problem is that it adds stresses to the hips, knees and ankles. The way to help your child with this is to take one leg out of it at a time. You can say, "Let's fix your legs" as you do this. As your child gets older you can say, "fix your legs" and he will get out of "w" sit on his own. There is no need to make your child stressed about this. By the time he gets to school he will be hearing "criss-cross applesauce" about 20 x per day.



4. Fun Activities to do with your Toddler -

- **Roll around!** Though rolling is an infant developmental milestone it is important for toddlers too. When a child advances to a new milestone they get a bit "out of whack;" Their arms are out and their legs are wide to increase their base of support. This is seen when they start walking or running. These are excellent strategies but create a rather "disorganized" sensation for the body. Activities that revisit past skills help with this. Crawling on the ground together and rolling around to playfully "wrestle" on a soft surface can be very centering and therapeutic to your toddler during these times.
- **Pillow Obstacle Course** - This activity helps your child work on the strategies needed for dealing with varied surfaces and environment. It allows her to go from stand to crawling and climb up and fall down.

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- **Picking up objects off of the floor and placing them up high** - This can be done by placing small objects (blocks, cotton balls, crayons) on the floor and have them pick them up and put them up high around chest or shoulder height. You can put a bucket on the couch. This activity helps him with squatting and with going up and down. Additionally it is working on fine motor activities of the hands and cognitive development.
- **Playing ball in any form** - Rolling, tossing, throwing, kicking. Anything with a ball is beneficial to a toddler. This works on gross motor skills and visual motor skills.

Enjoy exploring the world through your toddlers eyes! This should be a fun process. Also remember that small concerns in your child's development should be addressed and not dismissed. Though a small challenge or struggle may not indicate a developmental delay, it could be impacting their freedom of movement. Interventions of Physical and Occupational Therapy, Acupuncture, and CranioSacral Therapy can be helpful. If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Thank you for sharing your time and children with me today!