

To help your child jump, climb and ride ...

If your child's vision has never formerly been tested (or has not been tested recently), and you are concerned about tripping or falling consider going to see the optometrist. As a simple eye exam may explain things. It is surprising just how many children whose parents believe their children can "see" benefit greatly from the use of glasses.

Make sure your child is wearing shoes that are the right size. Improper fitting shoes can be a factor in decreased balance skills and tripping. Also dress your child in running shoes, as sandals and flip flops are often responsible for causing increased trips and falls in children.

Discourage "w" sitting position (knees in front and feet behind – resembling a "w"). This posture is not only potentially harmful to hip, knee and foot joints; it does not allow for the development of trunk muscles. When a child sits in this position, they do not have to use any muscles to remain upright. In fact, some siblings love this position when they have aggressive brothers/sisters as they will never fall over! This position also limits the typical movement pattern of using trunk rotation when moving from floor to standing which further limits developing strong trunk muscles. Finally, this position is commonly linked to parents concerns regarding in-toeing (hips, knees or feet turning in with walking).

- Build on skills your child can do. Not only will they develop their muscular strength but it will also develop their thinking and problem solving skills! Often we assume that once a child can do a skill they should be an expert. This is not the case! So allow time for your child to work with building muscle strength/endurance with the skills they are already successful at.
- For example, if your child can ride a tricycle for 1 metre, encourage them to ride 2 metres, 5 metres, 10 metres etc. until they are riding around the block.
- Once a skill is established it takes time to get good at it. To become an expert it requires variation, minimal support, exploration, trial and error, challenge and patience. So remember to always "set-up for success" first and then slowly challenge or change the variables. It is always best to encourage your child to enjoy participating first in the task, as they cannot become an expert until they have mastered the skill under a variety of conditions!
- Break skills down into small steps.

- Encourage gross motor challenges in your child's day. For example use a small step stool in the bathroom and encourage stepping up/down independently with assistance from the counter. As your child becomes stronger encourage hands free (as safety permits). Or if your child always leads walking up stairs with the same foot, encourage leading with the opposite foot. Sometimes a foot preference can develop based on what side the railing is on. So if your child requires a railing you may need to initially hold their hand as they lead with the opposite foot, if your home does not have 2 railings.
- Add exercises into your day. For example always take the stairs when the opportunity presents, walk up/down curbs, walk/run on a variety of surfaces (grass, woodchips, sand).
- Encourage climbing skills using hands and feet when at the park. This skill is often overlooked but is a very effective way to build trunk strength and co-ordination skills. Not to mention it is fun!
- Encourage lots of squatting throughout the day. Typically young children play in/out of a deep squatted position (bum almost touching the floor knees fully bent) several times an hour. Encourage this by having them play tidy up games with picking toys up off the floor.
- Encourage walking/running in a variety of directions (forwards/backwards/side-ways) and on variety of surfaces (up/down inclines, wood chips, grass etc.).