

To help your child walk ...

Encourage lots of opportunity for your child to be on their feet. In this position (for example at a coffee table) encourage good posture (i.e. shoulders over feet; versus shoulders significantly in front of feet or feet really wide compared to shoulders). In this position encourage lots of:

- Turning and reaching for toys placed at their side (requiring body to rotate and reach with one hand)
- Encourage lots of squats (bending at knees - to pick objects up off ground – may need to initially offer the toy at knee height). Work towards performing a full bend at the knees (bum almost touches floor).
- Encourage your child to move from the floor to standing at the support surface and back down to the floor with control versus letting go and falling on their bottom
- Cruising (walking sideways) both directions. As this skill progresses encourage stepping between 2 surfaces that are side by side. Once this is accomplished encourage your child to rotate between surfaces by setting up an area where 2 surfaces **are parallel** (i.e. couch and ottoman/coffee table) and encourage your child to move from one surface to the next using trunk rotation. This is a great way for your child to develop trunk strength and balance skills.
- Please note: standing in exersaucers and jolly jumpers does not allow for the same skill development. In fact 3 of the 4 ideas listed above cannot be achieved using either piece of equipment. If an exersaucer or jolly jumper is used it should be used for no more than 10 minutes at a time and restricted to only a few times per day.
- Build on the skills your child can do. Not only will this 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 muscular strength/endurance with the skills they are already successful at. Also generally speaking, skills build on one another and when the child is strong enough they move onto the next skill. For example: repeating the tasks above several times during play time will help to develop strength and balance skills needed for independent walking. 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. As 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!

- Encourage lots of opportunity for gross motor challenges in your day. For example encourage lots of climbing over soft objects, climbing up the stairs with close supervision, and encourage cruising to get to a favorite toy versus giving the toy to your child.
- 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 needed for sturdy independent walking. This is due to the “w” sitting posture limiting the typical movement pattern of trunk rotation. Although children can still “rotate” in this position for toys they are not developing their trunk muscles in the same way due to the posture offering so much stability. The other way this position limits the typical development of trunk rotation muscles is when moving from floor to standing. As the “w” sitter simply moves forward placing their hands on the ground and moves up into standing. Whereas the non “w” sitter rotates to the side first. As a result, games that encourage your child to move from sitting to their hands and knees and from their hands and knees back to sitting going over their sides is a very good strength developing activity. If your child is not able to perform this skill (moves from hands and knees and “backs up” into sitting or moves from a sitting posture straight forward to hands and knees) your physiotherapist will teach you strategies to develop this skill at assessment. However, in the meantime try to decrease the use of “w” sitting by encouraging a cross legged sitting posture or sitting in a small chair (if safe). Lastly, this position is commonly linked to parents concerns regarding in-toeing (hips, knees or feet turning in) amongst walking children. As a word of advice it is very easy to suggest no “w” sitting, however it is a very hard habit to break in children once it becomes a dominant sitting posture.