



Movement, Coordination, and Your 1- to 2-Year-Old

Walking is the major achievement of this age and over the course of the year your child will likely get much better at it. As your child's mobility improves, so will his or her ability to investigate places he or she couldn't go before. Once again, take a look around your home from your child's vantage point. It's a good idea to childproof your home to keep up with your child's advancing skills.

How Is My Baby Moving?

Though some babies take their first steps before their first birthdays, most children learn to walk well in the months after they turn 1.

Young children who are learning to walk are called "toddlers" because that's exactly what they do - they toddle. Typically, they keep their legs wide apart and seem to hesitate between each step, jerking from side to side as they move one foot forward, then the next. About 6 months after taking the first steps, toddlers typically develop a more mature gait, holding their hands at their sides (rather than out in front for balance) and moving with their feet closer together. They also tend to move their feet in a way that looks more like walking - moving from the heel to the toe.

During these months of practice, be aware that your toddler may experience his or her share of falls, but this is part of learning to walk. Although you may not be able to prevent your child from falling, you can reduce the risk that your toddler will get injured by having your child move around on soft carpeted surfaces and keeping your child away from the sharp corners of furniture and objects.

To get back up from a fall, your child may place his or her hands out in front, lift up his or her bottom, and then pull his or her feet under. It may not look very graceful, but it works.

After walking for a couple of months, your child will begin to feel more confident in his or her ability to walk and take on new challenges - such as picking up and carrying objects, moving while pulling a toy behind, and climbing stairs. By the middle of the second year, your child may learn to run, start to kick a ball, and even attempt to throw a ball overhead. By 2 years, your child may jump in place.

As your child develops the ability to move, your child is also learning. You will notice that your child seems extremely interested in finding out how things work. It's a good idea to offer your child many safe opportunities to do this.

What Can I Do to Help My Child's Development?

It's a good idea to offer your child lots of things to do and see in his or her new upright position. You may want to take walks around your yard or through the neighborhood together or hold hands and climb up and down the stairs together. You can even make an obstacle course of pillows or boxes and encourage your child to walk, climb, and crawl through it. You may also want to have balls for kicking and throwing.

As your child is developing movement skills, you may want to keep in mind the general guidelines for physical activity in toddlers that has been established by the National Association for Sports and

Physical Education.

- Toddlers should accumulate at least 30 minutes daily of structured physical activity like playing on the playground, going for a walk, or being in a parent-and-child tumbling class. Preschoolers should have at least 60 minutes of this kind of activity.
- Toddlers should also have at least 1 hour of unstructured free play, when they can explore and play with toys.
- Toddlers and preschoolers should have at least 60 minutes and up to several hours of this unstructured free play each day.
- Toddlers should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time, except while they are sleeping.
- Toddlers and preschoolers should have indoor and outdoor areas that meet or exceed recommended safety standards for all of their activities.

As your child is developing these physical skills, your child will also be developing the ability to use his or her hands more. There are toys and objects you can provide your child to help encourage this development. They include:

- paper and crayons
- sculpting dough
- simple stacking toys that your child can build up and knock down
- simple puzzles

When Should I Call the Doctor?

Your child's doctor will likely talk to you about your child's developing ability to move during your child's routine physical exams. It's a good idea to let your child's doctor know if your child does not:

- walk by 18 months
- walk in a pattern after several months of practice
- walk any way but on the toes
- climb stairs while holding on

Remember that normal child development follows a certain pattern. The skills that babies develop early serve as building blocks that they will need to develop other skills down the road. That said, there is a wide variation in the time it takes for infants and children to develop these skills. If you are concerned about your child's development, talk to your child's doctor.

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