



Gross Motor: Improving Coordination

As children grow, muscle coordination develops with everyday play and activities. Fine motor skills that allow a child to hold a spoon, pencil and color within the lines comes slowly but surely. Coordination also gives children the ability to complete more complex tasks such as riding a bike, kicking a ball or participating in team sports. All children develop at different speeds, but parents can help this progress with simple activities and exercises.

Learning Skills - Every move that a child makes helps prepare the child to learn a new skill. Balance and coordination go hand in hand in the development of a child's body. As an infant, your child begins developing coordination skills with grasping your fingers. Play a game of patty cake with your infant to encourage him to use both hands together. Hold a rattle in your hand and play Find the Rattle. Tuck it behind baby's head and shake it until the baby turns to find the rattle. As coordination increases, your baby will reach for the rattle as his prize. As soon as a baby decides to pull himself up onto his feet, he opens a wonderful world of exploration and learning. Once mobile, a child can grab his own toys, learn to hold more than one object at a time and follow movements with his eyes. Parents play a key role in helping children develop coordination by playing simple games with the child. Using squeaky toys to encourage the child to grasp tightly with a resulting squeak boosts coordination. Stacking blocks or cups also helps develop logic and reasoning. Give your baby a pile of Goldfish crackers and have him fill the stacking cups. As the child gets older, these games and exercises can become more complex as dexterity improves.

Games as Exercise - Playground Games present the optimal way to teach a child coordination skills. Simply rolling a ball to a toddler invites him to return the ball to you. The actual development that occurs during this movement entails tracking the ball with his eyes, engaging hands to catch the ball and using logic to return the ball to the sender. Your child learns to complete these activities better each time using coordination. Other games for coordination include ring toss, hopping on one foot, playing tag, whiffle ball and jumping rope. Simple games provide coordination exercises for your child, allowing him to explore the boundaries of his capabilities. Games and play elevate a child's heart rate to an aerobic level. Running in circles in the front yard might seem fruitless and silly, but this typical activity actually goes some good. Running requires coordination and balance to keep from falling. Game time play can be one of the most effective types of coordination exercise. Basketball requires concentration and dexterity to place a ball through a hoop. Hitting a baseball requires hand-eye coordination. Climbing on playground equipment provides plenty of exercise as well as coordination involving decision making and strength.

Hand Dexterity - Coordination exercises for children include simple everyday tasks that adults take for granted. However, these basic skills develop hand coordination that allows a child to eventually write properly, read and perform intricate tasks with age. Some hand coordination exercises include putting puzzles together, drawing or coloring, cutting paper, stacking blocks and dressing oneself. Clothing snaps, buttons, zipper and ties require both hand and visual dexterity for children to master these small tasks. Repeated exposure to activities will help your child excel and advance through these simple tasks.

Body Exercises - As cliched as it sounds, sound bodies make sound minds. Children must master their physical bodies to be prepared to learn. Encourage playground play every day, if possible. Climbing, running, jumping and mastering the other challenges on the playground give a child incredible confidence. Make a kid-sized obstacle course in your back yard to help teach your child coordination. Include hula-hoops, cones to run around, low blocks to jump over and tunnels to climb through for a challenge. Encourage coordination by purchasing a children's fitness ball to incorporate into your child's exercise routine. These scaled down versions of an adult-sized exercise ball provide a fun workout that will teach coordination, balance and provide an aerobic workout for your child. Children learn by example, so participate in coordination activities with your child. Always encourage your child even when he can't hit a ball, make a basket or run the obstacle course the first time. New things might require practice. Just remember that nearly every activity your child wants to do naturally improves coordination. Something as simple as setting the kitchen table teaches logic and balance.