

Motor Skills Development in Toddlers: Key Insights



Highlights

Fine motor skills involve using hands and fingers to control small objects.

Gross motor skills involve using large muscles for larger movements.

Children develop motor skills at different rates, but most reach milestones within certain age ranges.

Early activities such as drawing, building with blocks, or playing with sand can help develop motor skills.

In This Article

What are motor skills?

Fine motor skills

Gross motor skills

When to seek help

Tools And Assistance

What Are Motor Skills?

Children develop two types of motor (movement) skills:

Fine motor skills: Involving the use of hands and fingers for smaller tasks.

Gross motor skills: Involving the large muscles in the body for bigger movements.

Fine Motor Skills

Fine motor skills engage the small muscles in the hands and fingers, helping your child to:

Hold

Grasp

Grip

Pinch

Examples of fine motor skills include:

Buttoning a shirt

Holding a pencil

Picking up food

These skills are crucial as they help children learn how to take care of themselves and eventually write. Research suggests a link between fine motor skills development and language, literacy, and brain development.

At What Age Will My Child Develop Fine Motor Skills?

Babies start grasping objects using their hands between 5 and 6 months old.

By 18 months, toddlers begin to attempt more complex skills, such as drinking from a cup, trying to dress themselves, and using crayons.

Between 2 and 3 years old, they may be able to turn doorknobs or screw jar lids.

By 5 years old, your child may show a preference for one hand over the other.

How Can I Help My Child Improve Their Fine Motor Skills?

You can encourage your child to grow and practice fine motor skills through activities such as:

Painting, drawing, and using safety scissors.

Playing with blocks, Lego, or doing puzzles.
Rolling playdough into shapes and cutting with cookie cutters.
Playing with sand using shovels and buckets.
Threading beads.

Gross Motor Skills

Gross motor skills involve the larger muscles in the body, like those in the arms, legs, and torso. They are used for activities such as:

Crawling
Jumping
Running
Throwing

As children develop their gross motor skills, they become more active and energetic.

When Will My Child Develop Gross Motor Skills?

From their first 2 months, babies begin kicking their legs and waving their arms.

By 6 to 8 months, most babies can roll, reach, and sit briefly.

By 12 to 18 months, most babies are walking.

By 2 years, toddlers can jump over small objects, throw a small ball, and walk up and down stairs.

By 3 to 5 years, they begin climbing on playground equipment and walking on balance beams.

How Can I Help My Child Improve Their Gross Motor Skills?

Encourage your child to safely explore their environment. Activities include:

Blowing and chasing bubbles outside
Dancing to music at home
Encouraging them to help with tasks like gardening
Throwing a ball and having them throw it back
Visiting playgrounds and parks

Using large toys like ride-ons

When to Seek Help

Although children develop motor skills at different rates, seek advice if your 2- or 3-year-old:

Can't run

Can't walk up and down stairs, even with help

Has difficulty using small objects like a crayon

Doesn't scribble or try to draw

Loses physical skills they had previously

Tools and Assistance

If you're concerned about your child's motor skills development, there are various tools and resources that can help. You can seek guidance from:

A pediatrician or child health nurse

Early childhood education programs

Developmental milestone trackers and assessments