



Is Your Baby's Physical Development on Track?

You know your child best. So, it's important you share your concerns with your pediatrician if you think your little one's development isn't exactly on track.

Typically, children develop motor skills from the head down. First comes head control and then control over the upper body. The typical pattern for motor milestones is rolling over, then sitting, pulling up, standing, walking, and climbing. Small, fine motor skills, such as grasping objects, putting blocks in a cup, and scribbling are important milestones, too.



Physical developmental delays or **early motor delays** are terms used to describe when children are not meeting critical physical milestones in the first months and years of life – how well and soon they move and interact with their environment. These delays can be a sign of something more serious, so it is important to talk with your child's pediatrician about them.

Signs of a Physical Developmental or Early Motor Delay

- Delayed rolling over, sitting, or walking
- Poor head and neck control
- Muscle stiffness or floppiness
- Speech delay
- Swallowing difficulty
- Body posture that is limp or awkward
- Clumsiness
- Muscle spasms



Common Concerns from Parents about Delayed Physical Development

- My child doesn't seem to be growing the way he should.
- My child seems very stiff and tight in the way she moves.
- My child is weak and limp like a rag doll.
- My child isn't keeping up with children of the same age when they play together.
- My child seems to get tired very quickly.



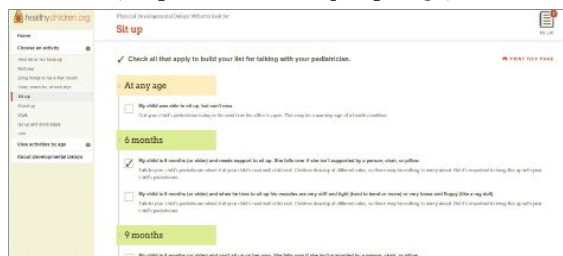
If either of the above lists of signs and concerns sound familiar or if you have other worries, speak up! Usually a child who is late doing certain activities catches up with children. But sometimes, developing late is the sign of a health condition. An estimated 400,000 babies born

each year in the United States are at risk for some form of neuromuscular condition, and one in 40 are actually born with an early motor delay. Spotting these signs and finding the health condition as early as possible will help your child get the care he or she needs. [Back to Top](#)

Physical Developmental Delays: What to Look For



(<http://motordelay.aap.org/>) When trying to spot an early motor delay, it is helpful to know the signs of typical and atypical physical development. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), created an online tool for parents called Physical Developmental Delays: What to Look For (<http://motordelay.aap.org/>).



(<http://motordelay.aap.org/>) This tool features an interactive experience to learn more about physical developmental delays in children 5 and under and can serve as a guide if you have a

feeling that something is wrong. You are also able to create a checklist of items to help start a conversation with your child's pediatrician.

Note: This tool only focuses on a child's physical development. If you're worried about other developmental issues, like social, emotional, communication, or learning, visit the Learn the Signs. Act Early (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html>). Also, keep in mind that if your child was born prematurely (before 37 weeks of pregnancy) he or she may develop later than other children the same age. See Premie Milestones (/English/ages-stages/baby/preemie/Pages/Premie-Milestones.aspx).

Additional Resources for Assessing Your Baby's Physical Development

Pathways.org offers free videos (<http://pathways.org/watch/>) and handouts (<http://pathways.org/print/>) that show typical and atypical physical development in infants at 2, 4, and 6 months of age. ChildMuscleWeakness.org also has a number of videos (<http://www.childmuscleweakness.org/index.php/videos>) and materials for families (<http://www.childmuscleweakness.org/index.php/materials-for-families>) to help recognize the first signs of childhood neuromuscular disorders.

Next Step: Talk with Your Pediatrician

When you express concerns your child is development to the pediatrician, he or she will listen carefully and may ask you some additional questions. You may also be asked to complete screening questionnaire online or on paper; this is an assessment for developmental delays (/English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Assessing-Developmental-Delays.aspx). Parent observations are an important part of a pediatrician's evaluation. Pediatricians use parental input on these questionnaires as a basis for further examination and referral. See these tips from the CDC for talking with your child's pediatrician about development (http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/help_pdfs/cdc_talktdoctor.pdf).

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Common Therapy for Physical Developmental Delays

Early intervention services ([/English/health-issues/conditions/developmental-disabilities/Pages/Early-Intervention.aspx](#)) include a variety of different resources and programs that provide support to families to enhance a child's development. These services are specifically tailored to meet a child's individual needs, and most commonly include pediatric physical, occupational ([/English/health-issues/conditions/developmental-disabilities/Pages/Occupational-Therapy.aspx](#)), and speech/language therapy ([/English/health-issues/conditions/developmental-disabilities/Pages/Speech-Language-Therapy.aspx](#)).

- If a child is delayed in large motor skills such as sitting up or walking, he or she may be referred to a physical therapist.
- If a child is having trouble understanding language, using language, or swallowing, he or she may be seen by a speech/language therapist.
- If the child is having trouble with fine motor skills, visual motor skills or independent living skills, such as feeding himself, picking up small objects, or buttoning his clothes, he or she may be referred to an occupational therapist.

Finding Support if a Health Condition is Identified

If a specific diagnosis is found in your child, your pediatrician can help you connect with special support groups and other resources for parents in your community. Parent support organizations such as Parent Project Muscular Dystrophy (<http://endduchenne.org/>) help you figure out what to do, especially in the first few weeks following a diagnosis, and offer you support in parenting a child with a special need. Some other conditions have well organized societies, such as the National Down Syndrome Society (<http://www.ndss.org/>), United Cerebral Palsy (<http://www.ucp.org/>), and the Muscular Dystrophy Association (<http://www.mda.org/>).

More Information

[Movement Milestones: Birth to 3 Months \(/English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Movement-Birth-to-Three-Months.aspx\)](#)

[AAP Motor Delay Tool \(/English/MotorDelay/Pages/default.aspx\)](#)

[Simple Ways to Entertain & Boost Your Baby's Development at Home \(/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Simple-Ways-to-Boost-Your-Babys-Development-at-Home.aspx\)](#)

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