The Cross Crawl

The Cross Crawl is a contralateral movement, similar to the action of walking in place and swinging the arms. The motion involves muscles of the hips, helping to stabilize the pelvis, while also activating muscle systems that mobilize and stabilize the shoulders. Cross-motor patterns can provide an ideal reciprocal torque of the upper and lower body in gravity, enhancing overall balance, coordination, and structural integrity. The exaggerated action of this movement restores whole-body motion as a context for other daily-life actions. The Cross Crawl is an ideal large-motor warm-up to prepare for small-motor skills, such as reading and writing, that require crossing the body's vertical midline. The motion of opposing limbs brings a sense of the mutual connections between hands, feet, arms, legs, the head and tailbone, and the upper and lower torso. The limbs feel light as rhythmic, symmetrical motion redistributes the body's weight.

To do this activity, stand comfortably and reach across the midline of your body as you alternately move one arm and its opposite leg, then the other arm and leg, rhythmically touching each hand or elbow to the opposite knee. Can you feel this contralateral movement originating from the core of your body? Once you feel comfortable crossing the midline while doing the basic Cross Crawl as pictured here, explore some of the variations below that call for you to use your body in as many new ways as possible. If you don't immediately enjoy the standing Cross Crawl, do it while lying down or sitting squarely in a chair and looking all around, until it feels more comfortable. A preference for whole-brain processing can be learned and integrated through Dennison Laterality Repatterning, so if you have any difficulty mastering the movement, DLR facilitated by a Brain Gym® Instructor may help.

Tips for the Cross Crawl

- Before you begin, walk across the room and back again, noticing whether your arms and legs feel coordinated as they make their reciprocal motions. Do you have an easy forward-and-back arm swing as you move through space? Now do the Cross Crawl, and then notice your degree of coordination as you walk across the room again.
- Sipping Water and doing the Brain Buttons activity helps prepare the brain and the rest of the body to respond to the Cross Crawl.
- To stabilize balance, do the movement slowly, pausing for a moment on each side. The Cross Crawl can be a very "dancey" movement, so also experiment with dancing it. And for more aerobic benefits, do a faster, yet still fluid, version.
- For further activation, press each standing leg down, lifting your head and torso as you press each raised knee slightly upward in turn, against the alternate hand.
- Alternately reach down behind you to touch each hand's opposite foot (The Hopscotch).
- Reach to your full extension in varied directions (to the front, back, and sides) with each arm and its opposite leg in turn (The Cross Crawl Reach).
- To sit more squarely in your chair, do the activity while sitting: cross-crawl as you sit forward with your back upright, extending the opposite elbow or hand to each raised knee, in turn, as you also draw back each free arm in a relaxed way.

Coaching Variations

- To cross-crawl for focus, the student can do a slow-motion Cross Crawl, elongating opposite arms and legs to their full extension.

- Skipping (or bouncing lightly) between each Cross Crawl is especially helpful for centering, and also alleviates visual stress (The Skip-Across).
- To improve balance, the learner can cross-crawl with her eyes closed or pretend to swim while cross-crawling.
- For children who may appreciate this cue, you might offer color-coded stickers or ribbons for opposite hands and feet.
- Students can use their hands and feet to create rhythms as they do the Cross Crawl, or do the activity to a variety of musical rhythms.
- To ease the walking gait, have the learner explore consecutive aspects of balanced walking before doing the Cross Crawl. Notice: Does her foot strike the ground heel first? Do her arms swing forward and back? Is she able to relax her rib cage and shoulders? Does she keep her feet parallel (toes pointed ahead)? Can she push off with the rear foot with each step? Now ask her to do the Cross Crawl and then walk again.

Perceptual/Cognitive Functions This Activity May Access

- crossing the visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile midline
- binocular vision (the use of both eyes together)
- spatial awareness

Academic Skills This Activity May Enhance

- spelling and writing
- listening
- reading and comprehension

Related Movements

- Lazy 8s
- Brain Buttons
- The Thinking Cap

Behavioral/Postural Correlates:

- improved left-right coordination
- ease of movement through the counterbalancing of the limbs
- enhanced breathing and stamina
- improved listening and attention

How the Cross Crawl Worked for Karla

"When my daughter Karla was thirteen and in the seventh grade, one night she said she needed help with her algebra homework. It was already about nine o'clock, and I had put in a long day of work. I told her I'd help her if she would do PACE with me first. Because Karla was already feeling frustrated, she was angry at me for this request, but she went ahead and drank some water, did Brain Buttons (scowling at me the entire time), and then did a very irritable Cross Crawl about four times. Then suddenly she said, 'Oh, I know how to do it.' I said, 'Great! Explain it to me.' She explained it perfectly. Karla went to bed happy, and I felt so relieved!"

—**Julie Newendorp, Santa Barbara, California, U.S.A.**

The History of the Activity

As a child grows, the interweaving of movement on opposite sides of the body naturally occurs during such activities as crawling, walking, and running. During the last century, crawling has been used to maximize learning potential. Experts have theorized that contralateral movement works by activating the brain's speech and language centers; we further hypothesize that the Cross Crawl activity is effective because it provides a consistent pattern of whole-body movement.