

# Physical Activity with Infants

Physical activity should be promoted from birth. Muscles are not well developed at birth, and most physical activity during the first 12 months of life involves building muscle mass. Muscle stability and skill development begin with the core muscles (e.g., neck, shoulders, trunk, and hips) and progresses to the extremities (e.g., arms and legs).

Encourage and support physical activity and movement throughout each day. Physical activity for infants involves all types of movements, including sitting up, rolling over, crawling, standing, and eventually walking. Encourage infants to move independently. Development of physical skill requires practice and repetition. Skills do not develop just because the child ages.

## **Infants learn from every sound, sight, touch, taste, and smell.**

Give each infant one-on-one attention. Carry infants to new environments throughout the day. Talk to the infant and point out people and items. Support verbal interaction through cooing and babbling. Infants may mimic the caregiver's sounds, and caregivers may mimic the infant's sounds. Play baby games, such as peek-a-boo, to help infants realize that after people disappear, they can come back. Infants enjoy repetition and familiarity; the same peek-a-boo game is enjoyable and beneficial to infants again and again!

## **Incorporate physical activity into daily routines.**

Early physical activities involve the adult moving the infants' body parts while talking and interacting. Sing songs and talk to infants during routine activities. Repeat simple songs or phrases during activities, such as feeding, diapering, and preparing for sleep. Infants will begin to associate specific sounds, words, and movements with these routines. After naptime, move the young infant's arms and legs before lifting the infant out of the crib. After diaper changes, encourage movement and grasping while washing the infant's hands. Encourage the infant to grasp the bottle during feeding. Allow the infant to reach for and grasp a spoon during feeding of solid foods. Provide finger foods as the infant learns to self-feed.

## **Encourage movement throughout the day.**

Being active as an infant means lifting the head, kicking, and reaching during tummy time; reaching for or grasping toys or other objects; playing and rolling on the floor; and, crawling around the

environment. Smile and applaud attempts at any new skills. Nurturing through facial expressions, verbal praise, and other encouragement promotes self-esteem as well as development of language and communication skills.

Provide the least restrictive environment that is safe and clean, such as an uncluttered floor space of at least 5 X 7 feet. Infant play space should be out of the caregiver's walking path, away from shelving and objects that could fall, and away from rocking chairs and other potential hazards. Create an environment that is comfortable for caregivers to be on the floor level when interacting with infants.

## **Provide safe toys.**

Infants enjoy soft, colorful toys that they can grasp. Provide toys that are soft, large, and lightweight. Encourage the child to reach, grasp, and hold by providing blocks, stacking toys, nesting cups, textured balls, and squeeze toys.

Avoid toys with small parts, such as buttons, that can be removed. Check fabric toys for tight seams; make sure stuffing cannot be pulled out. Avoid toys with strings or cords.



The following are examples of activities that are developmentally appropriate for infants, based on typical developmental milestones.

### **1-3 Months**

Nurture infants' motor skill development, especially head and trunk control, by:

- \* Giving supervised tummy time! Interact with an awake infant on his tummy for short periods of time (three to five minutes). Increase the amount of time as the infant shows enjoyment.
- \* Placing the infant on her tummy to practice lifting her head and kicking her legs.
- \* Placing the infant on his stomach across your legs while in a sitting position.
- \* Encouraging rolling over, body movement, and reaching. Place a brightly colored toy just out of reach.

### **3-6 Months**

- \* As the infant gains strength and torso control, place him on your lap, facing you. Hold his hands and encourage him to stand. Gently pull him into a standing position. With your full support, gently sway him from side to side.
- \* Stimulate hand and foot play. Place the infant in a sitting position between your legs with her back against your stomach. Support the head and the elbows while bringing one arm forward to reach for the opposite foot.
- \* While you are sitting, place the infant on her back with her feet on your chest. Bring her arms forward until the hands are together in front of the infant's eyes.
- \* Prop the infant in a sitting position with his back against your stomach. Place his hands on a ball. Help child roll the ball forward.
- \* Model hand clapping while singing a catchy tune. Show the infant how to clap hands by holding her hands. Model hand clapping again and let the infant watch you and imitate.
- \* Help infants begin to associate words and movement. Sit on the floor facing the infant. Begin by raising your arms about your head as you say "So big." Once you have the infant's attention, hold onto the infant's hands, raise his arms, and say "So big." A similar activity is to raise and lower the infant's legs while saying "Up and down."

### **6-9 Months**

- \* Encourage the increasing coordination of physical movements as the infant reaches, grabs, and transfers things from one hand to the other.
- \* Encourage hand-eye coordination and developing fine motor skills as the infant begins to feed himself.
- \* Allow the infant to explore freely on a clean, safe floor. Encourage creeping and crawling.
- \* Support the infant in an upright position to encourage balance and strength development.
- \* Move to music with the infant.

### **9-12 Months**

Infants are much more mobile and need to explore. Provide as much opportunity as possible to crawl, walk, and play. A safe environment is critical.

- \* Provide handholds for infants to pull themselves up. Promote balance development as they learn to walk.
- \* Do not use walkers!
- \* Allow the infant to walk barefoot indoors and develop his foot muscles

