

## Wee Builders (3 - 4 years): Gross Motor Skill Development and Delays in Childhood



Gross motor skills involve the large muscles of the body that enable functions such as walking, jumping, kicking, sitting upright, lifting, and throwing a ball. Acquiring motor skills is an important part of child development that allows children to participate in activities and achieve age-appropriate developmental milestones.

### Gross vs. Fine Motor Skills

Gross motor skills also require motor planning, the ability to think through and act upon a plan for motion. Gross motor skills involve the ability to use hands and feet for complex, large muscle activities, for example, running and jumping, and fine motor skills are used for small muscle activities such as writing and drawing.

### When a Child Is Late Reaching a Milestone

It is important to remember that all children develop at different rates. Developmental guidelines provide a general idea of the age at which children acquire these skills and in what order. Just as with other skills, there may be considerable individual differences when it comes to gross motor skill development.

Some children may hit these milestones quite early, while others may not achieve them until later. It is also possible that gross motor skill delays could be due to a physical concern. For example, low muscle tone (hypotonia) is a characteristic, as well as, muscle, and central nervous system disorders, among other things.

### Factors That Cause Delays in Development of Gross Motor Skills

There are a number of essential abilities that must be present for a child to hone his or her gross motor skills. Without them, gross motor skills may be delayed or underdeveloped. Some of them include:

- Muscle strength/tone
- Balance
- Coordination
- Stability and posture
- Motor learning

If your child seems to be struggling with some of these skills, it could be a sign of a problem that requires intervention and treatment. Talk about your concerns with your doctor if you believe there might be a physical problem interfering with your child's gross motor skill development.

### What to Do If You Suspect a Delay

Your physician will monitor your child's gross motor development during regular checkups to ensure that he or she is meeting developmental milestones. However, you should be sure to contact your doctor immediately if you notice changes in your child's ability to perform movements or skills that they used to be able to do. Parents and teachers may very well be the first to notice problems as they observe a child's actions every day.

### The Importance of Addressing Delays

Gross motor skills play an important part in a child's development, and these abilities tend to build upon each other progressively. Learning to walk, for example, then allows children to develop more advanced skills such as running and jumping.

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