

# Skills for Living

## Occupational Therapy Advice for: Developing Postural Stability and Control



### **What do we mean by Postural Stability / Postural Control?**

The movements of our body rely on having a strong and stable base from which to work. We often talk about “core stability” and this refers to the muscles in our back and tummy working to hold our spine shoulders and hips in a strong and stable position. This is important for holding our body in a straight and upright posture so we can move and work in a flexible and smooth way when doing more complicated activities.

When our postural control and core stability is weaker, our muscles find it hard to hold our body upright and we develop a weak and slouched posture. Children may often find it harder to sit upright, walk for any distance, balance, jump, skip or climb without getting very tired or being prone to trips and falls.

Children with poor postural stability may also find functional activities such as dressing, writing, and physical activities such as cycling and swimming more difficult to develop.

Postural stability and control starts to develop very early in children – from the day they begin to lift their head up. It develops further through tummy time activities, and then when babies learn to push up on their hands and begin to crawl. Crawling is a very important stage when children’s shoulders and hips become stronger in preparation for walking and using arms and hands for reaching and manipulation.

### **How can I tell if my child has difficulty with Postural Stability and Control?**

There are several features that a child with poor postural control and stability might demonstrate:

1. Slumping while sitting in a chair or standing upright.
2. Leaning their head on their hand or desk when writing
3. Leaning on furniture (or other people) often!
4. Difficulty with motor activities that need strength – riding a bike, swimming, walking any distance
5. Difficulty with balance – often falling over, especially on uneven ground
6. Fidgeting in their seat and having difficulty paying attention
7. Poor fine motor skills such as using pencils and scissors
8. Difficulty with dressing skills and other self-care activities which need a stable posture

You may see some of the following signs:

- Difficulty with balance activities such as standing on one leg, balance beam or stairs





- When the child is on their hands and knees, their spine may dip and curve more than expected
- The child may always complain of being tired when they have walked only a short distance
- The child may adopt a W-sitting posture when playing or sitting on the floor



### What Activities Can Help?

There are several exercises and everyday activities that can help to develop stronger core muscles and better postural control for children.

<b>Exercises to help develop core stability and control.</b>	
These exercises can be done at home, or built into a child's PE activities in school	
<p>1. Bridging</p> <p>Have the child lie on their back with their feet flat on the floor. Keeping the shoulders on the ground, ask them to push up through their heels to lift their bottom off the floor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do it for a count of 3, 5 10</li> <li>• Zoom cars underneath the bridge</li> <li>• Hold a soft toy between the knees</li> <li>• For a tougher challenge, place the child's feet on a cushion or other soft surface</li> </ul>	
<p>2. Superman</p> <p>To strengthen the back muscles, have the child lie on their tummy on the floor. Try to fly like Superman – lifting the arms and chest up off the floor as high as you can.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can the child raise their legs as well as arms?</li> <li>• Can they hold a ball or toy in their hands as they lift up?</li> <li>• Count to 5, 10, 15</li> </ul>	
<p>3. Knock Me Over</p> <p>The child should be sitting on a soft surface – a cushion on a seat etc. The adult would see if they could knock them off balance with a little amount of pressure. The child needs to</p>	

<p>try and stay strong. Push them forwards, backwards and sideways to work all of the muscles well.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have the child work in high kneeling and playing a game of catch. All of the core muscles will be needed to keep them balanced</li> <li>• Work with the child sitting on a large ball. All of the muscles will work to keep them balanced.</li> </ul>	
<p>4. Plank The plank position is a great core strength exercise. Have the child lie on their tummy and then push up on their forearms and toes into the position</p>	
<p>5. Wheelbarrow Walking The child walks on their hands while being held by an adult at their knees (easier) or at their ankles (harder).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many steps can they do?</li> <li>• Can they put a ball or beanbag into a basket?</li> <li>• Can they complete a puzzle in this position?</li> </ul>	
<p>6. Crab Walking Start off sitting on the floor, then using the hands and feet, lift the bottom up off the ground and begin to walk around like a crab.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you balance something on your tummy to take to another room?</li> <li>• Maybe a game of crab football with some friends?</li> </ul>	

Other helpful activities to help develop postural stability and control:

In the playground

- Swinging
- Climbing up a slide instead of sliding down
- Playing tug of war
- Pulling yourself along a seesaw or plank / balance beam – lying on your tummy
- Climbing frames / monkey bars
- Space hopper

At home / school

- Sitting on a therapy ball instead of a chair
- Doing chair push ups or wall push ups
- Working in different positions instead of sitting – tall kneeling or half kneeling



- Working on a vertical surface instead of a table – helps strengthen the core and shoulders (as well as other things)



- Working over a roll on the floor helps to strengthen the back muscles



Websites and online links for more information	
Pinterest - An online notice board of information	<a href="http://www.pinterest.com">www.pinterest.com</a> Type search words eg. “core strength activities for children” etc
For further information:  <b>Why Core Strength is Important for your Child and Fun Ways to Improve It – The NOATbook.com</b> <a href="http://www.thenoatbook.com/2014/07/why-core-strength-is-important-for-your.html?spref=pi">http://www.thenoatbook.com/2014/07/why-core-strength-is-important-for-your.html?spref=pi</a>	

**Core Strengthening Exercises for Kids** – The Inspired Treehouse

[http://theinspiredtreehouse.com/child-development-core-strengthening-for-kids/#\\_a5y\\_p=3194512](http://theinspiredtreehouse.com/child-development-core-strengthening-for-kids/#_a5y_p=3194512)

**Core Strengthening Through Everyday Play** – The Inspired Treehouse

<http://theinspiredtreehouse.com/core-strengthening-through-everyday-play/>

**Fun ways to use a Peanut Ball** – Growing Hands On Kids

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/342766221623651491/>