



Month 7: Stretch It Out & Balance

Introduction

Objectives of this month:

1. Caregivers will learn the progression and principles of developing balance skills in infants and children.
2. Caregivers will learn fun and easy ways of incorporating age-appropriate balance and stretching activities into their environments.
3. Children will challenge their balance reactions using various positions, equipment and activities.
4. Children will learn gentle stretches and how to listen to their bodies' reaction to these gentle muscle pulls.

Importance of Stretching

- Ensures appropriate range of motion for daily physical activities and hygiene.
- Teaches children how their muscles feel when stretched to longer lengths, and this knowledge will help in preventing muscular injuries.
- By preparing the muscles for physical activity, stretching reduces the risk of injury.
- Early stretching helps children develop life-long habits of taking care of and listening to their bodies.

Importance of Balance skills

- Teaches children how to maintain their bodies in upright neutral alignment against the forces of gravity.
- Allows children to maintain upright posture in the presence of their own movements (internal perturbations) and in the presence of outside forces (external perturbations).
- Allows children to engage in higher level gross motor activities – gymnastics, skating, bicycling, soccer, etc.
- Maintaining upright balance in various positions requires muscular work from postural muscles, and therefore keeps these muscles groups strong.

References:

Invest in Kids Foundation. (2001). What a child will be depends on you and me: A resource kit for a child's first five years. Toronto (ON): Invest in Kids Foundation

SPARC: Sports and Recreation New Zealand (2008). Balance: swinging, spinning and rocking. Active Movement.

Developmental Expectations for Developing Balance

- 6-8 months:** Sits unsupported, and maintains sitting balance while moving hands and arms to grasp toy (sitting balance emerges).
Breaks fall by extending arm and supporting self with open palm when tilted to one side in sitting position (lateral protective reaction).
When tilted forward from sitting position, breaks fall by extending one or both arms and supporting self with open palm (anterior protective reaction).
- 9-11 months:** When pushed backwards from sitting, stops fall by extending arm(s) backward and supporting weight on open palm(s) (posterior protective reaction).
Frees hand and body from support and maintains balance in standing position for 5 seconds (standing balance emerges).
- 12-14 months:** Walks with a narrow base of support, with heel-toe gait for 5 feet. Maintains tall kneel position for 5 seconds (on both knees with hips in extension)
- 15-18 months:** Walks 10 feet quickly.
Walks backward 5 steps.
- 19-24 months:** In standing, lifts foot to contact ball on the floor – attempts kicking.
Stands on 2-inch wide line with one foot in front of the other – toe of back foot is within 3 inches of front foot.
Walks with one foot on 4-inch wide line for distance of 6 feet.
Kicks ball 3 feet forward.
- 25-30 months:** Walks down 4 steps without support
With hands on hips, and without heels touching toes, takes 3 steps forward on 4-inch line.
With hands on hips, and without heels touching floor, walks on tip toes for 5 steps.
- 31-36 months:** Placing one foot on each step, walks up 4 steps without support.
Stands on one foot for 3 seconds with hands on hips.
- 37-42 months:** Stands on one foot for 5 seconds with hands on hips.
Walks forward 8 feet on 4-inch wide line without stepping off, with hands on hips and without heels touching toes.
- 43-48 months:** With arms held overhead and without moving, child stand on tip toes.
Stands on one foot with hands on hips without swaying more than 20 degrees.
- 49-54 months:** Hops 3 feet on one foot, changes feet and hops back.
Stands on either right or left foot for 3-5 seconds with hands on hips.
Able to ride a trike or bike with training wheels

55-60 months: Stands on both left and right feet for 10 seconds with hands on hips and without swaying more than 20 degrees.

61-72 months: Without losing balance or letting free foot touch the floor, hops 20 feet in 6 seconds or less.
Child masters riding a bicycle.

References:

Cornish, Andree., Summersby, Louise D. (2006). Gross motor development from birth to six years. One Kids Place (OKP).

Folio, M. Rhonda., Fewell, Rebecca R. (2002). Peabody motor development chart. Austin (TX): Pro-ed.