

Balance

Balance is central to all our movements, it is the ability to make adjustments to posture to ensure we stay upright as our body or parts of our body changes position in space. We are in fact never truly still, even when we think we are; video evidence will show small amount of constant movement called postural sway.

If we experience an extreme or sudden change in our body position such as in extreme reach or when pushed we may lose our balance but our saving reactions then come into play putting our arms to protect us as we fall onto hands and hopefully not our heads.



For good balance skills we need core stability where we have strong back and stomach muscles that work together in a coordinated way and also good shoulder and hip girdle stability and strength. Children with poor balance will look “wobbly” and cannot do activities such as stand on one leg.

Activities to promote static balance (balance without travel)

- Suspend a ball from a piece of apparatus using string or a softball in a long sock. Stand in a large hoop, feet apart, maintain balance while avoiding the swinging ball. Grade by using smaller hoops; stand on two chalked foot prints: 15 cm apart/side by side/touching/heel to toe; stand on an uneven surface, eg a cushion
- Balance activities in lying and sitting such as lifting arms and legs off the floor
- Balance activities on wobbly or uneven surfaces such as wobbly boards or cushions
- Walk/crawl over uneven surfaces
- Wobble boards. Simply stand on it to start and then add in games, eg catching bean bags

To achieve stillness in balance.

- Use two chairs about shoulder width apart. Stand in between them, feet slightly apart, one hand supported on each chair back. Lift each foot alternately and hold to the count of three. Provide something to look at so that the head is kept looking straight ahead.
- Grade by using less support from the chair, ie one finger on each chair, one finger on one chair, arms outstretched to the side, increase the length of time balancing on each foot.
- **Pelvic strength:** work on pelvic stability with pushing games using legs and feet and increase resistance against the item being pushed. Encourage parents to get the child walk for about 30 minutes daily; pulling activities with upper limbs such as carts will also increase pelvic girdle strength.
- **Stand on one leg** start by lifting leg off floor and holding onto a support, gradually take hand off support for longer periods of time. Have two children each holding one side of a hoop and each stands on one leg or takes it in turns; have a football and child keeps one foot on top of the ball as balances

Activities to promote dynamic balance (balance while moving)

Stepping/walking games

- Start with smooth and slow activities, focus on quality of the actions, then as skill increases so can the speed
- Walking in steps into chalk circles; hoops; footprints; stepping stones etc. Change the steps: fairy steps; giant steps; quiet steps

- As above but pausing at each step or blow a whistle and change to side steps or backward steps or stop and hold position mid step.
- Following a taped or chalk line make it zigzag or curvy, walk again in different ways on tip toes; heel-to-toe; backwards; sideways.
- Introduce something to balance as walk, eg pebble on a spoon; bean bag on a head; ball on back of a hand
- Use music for rhythmic stepping or marching
- As you improve, introduce uneven surfaces or items to balance along, such as benches or wooden runways
- Stilt walking; using cushions under feet as ice skates make these activities harder again
- Musical statues stop when the music does and hold the position
- Support the lower part of the body by using a small box. Push up with arms straight keeping head up then use one arm for an activity
- Wheelbarrow walking, start by getting the child to hold thigh and the knee etc.

Jumping games: two feet together

- Jump in out of hoops and chalk circles grade by increasing distance and speed
- Using cut out pieces jump into puddles/over puddles/onto islands
- Jump over “fences” using wooden blocks
- “Jump-scotch” with two feet

To hop a child needs to be able to stand on one leg and also know how to jump (see above). When they have achieved these skills try hopping.



Hopping games

- Supported balanced on one foot and hop on the spot
- Using a table or chair back for support balance on one foot on the newspaper. Hop so the paper can be pulled away.
- Practise these activities on the alternate foot.
- Hop moving forward for a nominated number of hops.
- Using chalk marks close together on the floor, hop from mark to mark. This should be practised until the hopping looks more smooth and fluid.