

# Babies on the move -gross motor activities to do with your infant

## Strengthening back and stomach muscles

Begin with the infant lying on their back. Hold out your index fingers and encourage them to grab hold. Gently pull them up to a sitting position and then slowly lower them. Do this several times, decreasing your pull a little each time, as long as the baby enjoys it. Soon they may pull themselves up with very little assistance.



## Encouraging arm motions

Place a shiny tin plate just beyond the baby's reach. When they reach to pat or bang the pan, notice their interest in the reflections. Another time, add a second pie plate and demonstrate how to bang them together. Then let the baby try.

Encourage further arm movements by attaching a short ribbon to a rag doll and bouncing the doll in front of the infant. They may enjoy reaching for it. If so, let them try bouncing the doll themselves.

Another arm exercise can be done by gently moving the infant's arms over head and down again. Move one arm at a time, then both together. Bring their arms to their side, then put one above their head. Vary motions to the baby's delight while reciting this simple jingle:

Little bird, little bird, fly about,  
First fly in and then fly out.  
Start down low, and then go high,  
Little bird, little bird, loves to fly.

## Exercising arms and legs

Babies love music and rhythm, so why not combine them to help strengthen arm and leg muscles? To do this:

- Bounce your baby on your knee as you help them clap their hands to a rhythmic poem.
- Use a drum or tambourine to softly tap out simple tempos for them to move to, then offer them the instrument.
- Place your infant in a swing or bouncy chair and help them bounce to the music for a few minutes.
- Hold baby by the hands and do deep knee bends together to music. Babies often love this so much they don't want to stop.



## Practicing stretching and reaching

Find an object that has some stretch or 'give' to it, such as a sock, panty hose, or a piece of thick elastic. Tie a small toy to one end and dangle it in front of the baby while they are lying on their back. Encourage them to reach for the object, "Come on baby, you can get it!" When they have a good grasp on the toy, gently pull on your end to entice them to pull, too. If they are interested, get a little pulling game going together.

## **Inviting children to crawl**

A round basket or new trash can make wonderful toys for baby to crawl into, or make your own crawl-through tube by placing two 3-foot-long by 5-foot-wide pieces of carpet back to back. Roll the carpet up, making sure the opening is wide enough for the infant to crawl through. Then tie with heavy string. You can also use a big cardboard box. Encourage the baby to use this toy to climb on, push around, crawl through, or put things in. Use directional words such as 'over', 'through' and 'around' to help them discover more exciting ways to use their new toy.



## **Other ways to encourage crawling**

- place a toy where they have to crawl to reach it;
- toss a beanbag or a beach ball and invite the baby to crawl after it;
- roll a truck or other toy out of baby's reach and ask them to get it back, roll it again in another direction; and
- put pillows and cushions around the floor and watch as they enjoy the obstacle course!

