

Gross motor skills fact sheet and activity ideas

What are gross motor skills?

Gross motor skills involve movements of the large muscles of the arms, legs, and torso. These skills involve the coordination of the muscles and the neurological system. They impact balance and coordination. They also form the basis for fine motor skills that help us make small movements.

What are the building blocks to develop gross motor skills?

- **Neuromusculoskeletal and Movement-Related Functions:**
 - **Range of Motion:** The ability for a joint to move through its available degrees of freedom
 - **Muscle Power:** The available strength of a particular group of muscles
 - **Muscle Tone:** The degree of muscle tension (e.g., flaccidity, spasticity, fluctuation)
 - **Muscle Endurance:** Sustaining muscle contraction
 - **Involuntary Movement Reactions:** Postural reactions, body adjustment reactions, supporting reactions
 - **Control of Voluntary Movement:** Bilateral integration, crossing the midline, and oculomotor function
- **Motor Skills:** *Observable elements of gross motor actions that have an implicit functional purpose; motor skills are considered a classification of actions, encompassing multiple capacities and, when combined, underlie the ability to participate in desired activities.*
 - **Stabilization:** Moves through the environment and interacts with task objects without momentary propping or loss of balance

- **Reaches:** Effectively extends the arm, and when appropriate, bends the trunk to effectively grasp or place task objects that are out of reach
- **Bends:** Flexes or rotates the trunk as appropriate to the task when bending to grasp or place task objects that are out of reach or when sitting down
- **Coordinates:** Uses two or more body parts together to manipulate, hold, and/or stabilize task objects without evidence of fumbling task objects or object's slipping from one's grasp
- **Moves:** Effectively pushes or pulls task objects along a supporting surface, pulls to open or pushes to close doors and drawers, or pushes on wheels to propel a wheelchair
- **Lifts:** Effectively raises or lifts task objects without evidence of increased effort
- **Transports:** Carries task objects from one place to another while walking or moving in a wheelchair
- **Endures:** Persists and completes the task without obvious evidence of physical fatigue, pausing to rest, or stopping to "catch one's breath"

Gross motor activity ideas

1. **Animal Walks:** In an open space, practice bear, crab, dinosaur walks. Have a race!
2. **Ball:** Pass a ball to a partner, against the wall, or overhead. Experiment with different sizes or weights.
3. **Balloon:** Keep balloon in the air with hands, fly swatter, large piece of cardboard, etc. Set a count or time goal before the activity starts (e.g. keep the balloon up for 10 seconds *or* with 10 taps to keep it up).
4. **Bean Bag:** Bean bag toss to specified target/across body, or following directions (left, right, up, down, over, under, etc.).
5. **Dance Party:** Start/stop dancing, jumping, marching, skipping, etc. to preferred music. This activity can be completed seated or standing.
6. **Noodle:** Overhead presses, bicep curls, etc. with a pool noodle. Can progress to a broomstick or other heavier item.
7. **Obstacle Course:** In a large and open space, complete an obstacle course - walk, crawl, jump, self-propel on a scooter. Indoors, use furniture, pillows and blankets to create areas to crawl on, under, and through. Outdoors, you can use things like hula-hoops to jump in and out of, jumping jacks, belly crawling, bear walking, and other creative movements that challenge gross motor skills. Make sure to give safety cues.

8. **Simon Says:** Play a game of Simon Says that challenges sustained overhead work and moves that challenge available range of motion.
9. **Sorting Laundry:** Do a clothing relay - pass articles of clothing from one partner to the other to facilitate trunk rotation. The student can either remove articles of clothing from the washer/dryer and pass to a partner or receive clothing from a partner and pass to laundry basket.
10. **Wall Washing/Drawing/Painting:** On the wall or another vertical surface; trace a drawing, paint with water or paint, draw, or color with markers, chalk, or crayons. Add an element of sensory exploration by applying shaving cream or other “messy” material to the surface.
11. **Weighted Ball:** Toss or push a weighted ball across a flat surface to a partner
12. **Wheelbarrow Race:** Have a wheelbarrow walking race
13. **Back to Back:** Sitting or standing back to back with a partner, pass an item overhead, under your legs, or side to side. Try out items of different size and weight.
14. **Yoga:** Experiment with different yoga poses. Try out familiar poses or test out something new. Make up your own poses based on an animal or something in nature. Make sure to focus on deep breathing! This is a great resource for some yoga ideas: <https://www.blindalive.com/>

Functional gross motor skill practice opportunities in daily routines:

Bathroom:

- Brushing & washing hair
- Applying deodorant
- Drying off with a towel
- Opening and closing a shower curtain or door

Kitchen/Mealtime:

- Putting groceries away
- Retrieving ingredients or materials from cabinets
- Pushing in chairs
- Stirring, mixing, chopping, and serving food
- Clearing or setting the table

Dressing/Clothing Management:

- Upper and lower body dressing
- Pulling open drawers
- Hang up clothing on hangers, bars, or hooks
- Sorting laundry into different piles
- Pulling open dryer door, pulling laundry out of machine (wet=more resistance)
- Carrying laundry basket
- Putting on hats, gloves, coats, etc.
- Managing boots, umbrellas, and other weather gear

Other:

- Where appropriate, complete any functional activity seated, standing, kneeling, etc. to challenge positioning, balance, muscle control, and endurance.
- Where appropriate, complete above activities with one foot resting on a stool or ball to challenge balance.