

Building Big & Little Muscles



Toddlers build two kinds of muscle skills as they grow. Both are important. Both will help them get ready for school.

- ◆ **“Big muscle” skills** include things like running, jumping, climbing, and throwing. These are called **gross motor skills**.
- ◆ **“Little muscle” skills** include things like drawing, turning knobs, using a spoon, and picking up small objects. These are called **fine motor skill**

What your child can do

Big muscle skills: what to expect

Between 12 and 30 months, your toddler is learning to:

- Walk, run, and begin to jump with both feet
- Walk up and down stairs with your help
- Kick and throw a ball overhand
- Climb onto low furniture and playground equipment
- Balance on tiptoes and start to stand on one foot
- Ride and push small riding toys

Little muscle skills: what to expect

Between 12 and 30 months, your toddler is learning to:

- Pick up small objects using their thumb and pointer finger
- Scribble with a crayon and draw simple lines
- Stack three or more blocks
- Feed themselves with a spoon and drink from a cup
- Turn pages in a book
- Turn knobs or unscrew caps
- Pour objects out of a container



How you can help

- **Get outside and move.** Visit the playground, take walks, blow bubbles for your child to chase, and dance together to music. Aim for active play every day.
- **Practice stairs.** Hold your child's hand and go up and down stairs together. Count each step as you go.
- **Give them crayons and paper.** Let your child scribble and draw freely. Break crayons in half to help them learn a better grip for writing later. Try other art materials, like playdough, sidewalk chalk, or watercolors. All of these materials give children practice using the muscles in their hands and fingers.
- **Play with blocks and puzzles.** Stacking, sorting, and fitting pieces together builds little muscle skills and problem-solving at the same time.
- **Let them feed themselves.** It's ok if they get messy! Practice is how they learn.
- **Use push and pull toys.** Pushing a toy cart or pulling a box builds strength and balance for walking and running.
- **Let them go barefoot indoors.** Walking without shoes helps your toddler build balance and strength in their feet and legs.

Parents often wonder about the ages when their child will develop these skills. The [CDC milestones](#) offer more info on what to expect. Remember, every child grows at their own pace. Try not to compare your child to other children. If you have concerns about your child's development, talk to your baby's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family. All children under the age of 3 are eligible for [free screening for developmental delays](#).

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