

**A GUIDE FOR REFERRAL TO
PHYSIOTHERAPY**

**Adapted from a guide written by
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PHYSIOTHERAPY

What is a pediatric physiotherapist?

A pediatric physiotherapist (PT) is a university-trained professional who specializes in the promotion of gross motor development of infants and children. Gross motor development describes the process through which an infant or child acquires skills in order to explore their environment. All gross motor skills involve one or more of the following physical factors: movement, strength, balance, co-ordination and endurance.

When should a child be referred to physiotherapy?

A child should be referred to physiotherapy if there are concerns regarding a developmental or gross motor delay. A gross motor delay is identified when a child has difficulty acquiring some or all of the motor skills expected for children of similar ages. However, it is important to emphasize that there is a wide age range for each motor skill that is still considered typical. For example, some children will learn to walk as early as 10 months, while others will not take their first steps until they are 14 months old. The pediatric physiotherapist is able to determine the difference between typically developing skills and those that are abnormal and possible indicators of a movement disorder. A pediatric physiotherapist works closely with the family, caregivers, teachers and other health care professionals to ensure maximum potential development of the child.

Motor Development in the first three years.

Most of our basic motor skills are acquired during the first three years of life. These milestones, as they are commonly called, generally follow a predictable timeline as one skill will build upon the previous skill. The following chart outlines milestones typically acquired during this period and gives an indication when to refer to physiotherapy.

Age	Milestones Acquired	Refer if child:
0 - 6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Brings hands to midline -Develops head control -Follows a toy or parents face -Hands open more than closed -Will reach out for a toy -Pushes up with arms -Rolls from tummy to back -Rolls from back to tummy -Starts to sit with support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Moves one side less than the other -Feels floppy or rigid/ stiff -Does not bring hands to mouth -Does not hold head steady by 3 months -Does not open hands by 3 months -Does not raise up on tummy by 3 months -Does not roll to back by 4 months -Does not sit with support by 5 months -Does not roll to front by 6 months
6 - 12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sits independently -Moves into and out of sitting -Pivots and creeps on tummy -Starts to get up on all fours -Explores by crawling -Pulls to stand at furniture -Cruises sideways and forward -Walks with hands held -Starts to climb, navigate stairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Does not sit independently by 8 months -Does not pivot or creep by 9 months -Does not crawl on all fours by 10 months -Does not pull to stand by 12 months -Stands on toes when weight bearing
12 - 24 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Walks independently -Squats in standing -Walks backwards and sideways -Walks upstairs with support -Runs with co-ordination -Begins to jump -Throws and kicks a ball -Climbs over, under, through 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Does not cruise furniture -Seems stiff-legged or stands on toes -Does not walk by 16 months -Continually trips after 3 - 4 months of walking -Does not accurately judge distances and spaces when walking and crawling -Appears clumsy or tires easily
24 - 36 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balances on either foot Runs and stops with control Uses ride on toys, push with feet Starts to throw and kick with more accuracy Catches a large ball Jumps forward, off a step, over an object 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Does not run with co-ordination -Does not jump -Walks or runs on toes -Trips and falls easily -Is not able to balance on one foot -Has difficulty judging distance and space -Has poor strength, tires easily

Age	Motor Skills Acquired	Refer if child:
3 - 4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -alternate feet up stairs -jump from bottom step feet together -balance momentarily on one foot -use a tricycle -climb a ladder -walk line with heel toe pattern -run/turn/stop easily -throw and catch a ball 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Does not jump -Is not able to balance on one foot -Trips and/ or falls regularly -Is not aware of safety issues -Walks on tiptoes -Runs with uneven rhythm -Has difficulty figuring out a new motor activity
4 - 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -up and down stairs alternating feet -standing one leg 4 - 8 seconds -hop on one foot -standing/running broad jump -skips with one leg leading -throws overhand/ bounce a ball 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Is not keeping up with peers -Tends to avoid motor activities -Becomes disorganized with more complicated combinations of movement -Has difficulty judging space and distance
5 - 6 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -hop on one foot 10 times -walk balance beam -jump from table height -standing one leg 8 - 10 seconds -skips smoothly alternating feet -uses sport equipment (bats, rackets etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Has difficulties in age appropriate activities -Has difficulty participating in play with peers -Is at risk due to safety concerns -Is losing skills previously seen