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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: [patient-information@salisbury.nhs.uk](mailto:patient-information@salisbury.nhs.uk) if you would like a reference list.

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## ***Improving stability in pre-school children*** (page 1 of 3)

Some children take longer than others to develop enough muscle strength to gain stability. These children still fall within acceptable “normal” levels but are often hesitant in their movements, tire easily and can appear clumsy, falling frequently. They often walk with their feet turned inwards to increase their stability and will seek rest opportunities more frequently than other children.

Formal exercise is not successful with this age of child and is of little benefit, however there are a number of things that can be incorporated into their daily routine that can help. Children with low muscle strength or lax ligaments need to increase their core stability, strengthening their shoulder, trunk and hip muscles. Also it is important to increase their stamina. These suggested activities should be considered as fun if your child is to persevere and improve. It is important not to overload your child, so a busy activity should be alternated with a quieter one.

### **Activities**

Shoulder control is important in relation to hand function and general posture.

Activities that help:

- **wheelbarrow walking**
- **bunny hops**
- **lying on tummy resting chin on hands** (especially useful position if watching a video or reading a book)
- **commando crawling** or 4 point crawling around obstacles (under around and over), this can be advanced by placing a small object such as a bean bag on your child’s back
- **ball games**
- **writing on a blackboard**
- **construction games** and tower building e.g. Duplo, Lego, bricks.

Pelvic control is important for balancing, general posture and activities that involve standing on one leg such as walking, hopping and kicking a ball.

Activities that help:

- **balancing in half kneeling position (squatting down)** and walking in this position.

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- **throwing bean bags** or balls at targets then turning and stretching in this position to challenge balance
- **unstable sitting.** This can be done by sitting on a number of cushions or a large ball. This can be developed into keeping balance whilst throwing and catching a ball or playing games involving twisting or stretching
- **bridging** is when your child lies on their back with knees bent and lifts their bottom to make a “bridge”. Make it a game of seeing how many cars, animals, balls etc can be passed under the “bridge” before it lowers
- **stepping up and down** a step builds up stability and stamina.

### Approximate expected ability for standing on one leg:

3 year: old momentarily

4 year old: 3-5 seconds

5 year old: 8-10 seconds.

### General activities to aid stability

- **walking** is a great all-round exercise for increasing stamina and strength. This can become play by walking forwards, sideways and backwards, obstacle courses and balancing objects (e.g. egg and spoon). This can progress to running
- **swimming** is a great all-round activity for building up strength and stamina. Just by playing, and moving against the resistance of the water is great exercise
- **parks** are a good place for improving most areas of development including gross and fine motor control
- **soft play**, e.g. tumble tots, and indoor play areas
- **jumping**, bouncy castles, trampoline etc. Jumping generally increases muscle strength. This can be progressed to structured jumping with feet together forwards, backwards and sideways
- **balls skills.** Non-competitive ball skills can help to improve gross and fine motor skills, eye tracking, stamina and to help concentration and coordination
- **activity songs and finger rhymes** e.g. “head shoulders knees and toes” “Incey wincey spider”, “wheels on the bus” and “wind the bobbin up”. Incorporate these with dancing to music.

### Approximate expected ability for ball skills

3 year old: throws a ball and can catch a football if thrown into outstretched arms. Will kick a ball forcibly.

4 year old: shows increasing skill in throwing, catching, bouncing and kicking. Can use a bat.

5 year old: Plays a variety of ball games with considerable ability and is able to follow rules. Is able to stop a kicked ball and can aim a kick.

Little and often physical activity will help your child develop strength and stamina. Activities should be fun and if they can be incorporated into routines rather than “special sessions” then they are more likely to continue with them. With a gentle but sustained approach your child should gradually improve his/her stamina and stability.

If you have any concerns regarding the activities on these sheets or your child’s progress please call your therapist on the telephone number below.