

# Physiotherapy Advice for Down's Syndrome

Local advice and information  
for parents of children with  
Down's syndrome



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## Will my child need physiotherapy?

Most children with Down's syndrome have delayed motor development. They will usually achieve their motor milestones (e.g. rolling over, sitting, walking) but will do so at a slower pace. Therefore physiotherapy intervention is not usually necessary.

Some children with Down's syndrome may have greater difficulties with motor development and physiotherapy may be needed.

Physiotherapy may be needed if your child:

- is not able to hold their head up on their own at 8 months
- is unable to sit on the floor on their own with no support at 18 months
- won't take weight through their legs when placed in a standing position up against the sofa by the age of 2 years
- is not walking on their own by the age of 4 years (or by the time they start school)
- has additional problems with their spine that affect the way they lie, sit or move
- has additional problems with their heart that makes them extra tired or extra floppy
- is extremely floppy and not moving around much when up against gravity
- has other difficulties e.g. an additional diagnosis of another condition that has an impact on their movement.

If you are worried about any of these issues and would like to know if a physiotherapy referral is needed, please discuss this with your GP or Paediatrician who will advise you.

## How can I help my child?

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For activities to promote your child's motor and overall development see the Down's Syndrome Association 'New Parents Pack' which your Public Health Nurse (formerly Health Visitor) has given to you. Ask your Public Health Nurse for opportunities in your local areas e.g. groups to attend.

Once your child is walking, continue to encourage them to build up strength and stamina through daily activity that is meaningful, functional, fun and age appropriate.

Encourage your child to participate in suitable sports and leisure activities at their own level. If you have any concerns about your child participating safely in certain activities, discuss this with your Paediatrician who knows the medical needs of your child and can advise you accordingly. Promoting activity should continue throughout your child's life into adulthood.

## Will my child need special equipment?

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Usually children with Down's syndrome do not need special equipment but they may need specialist footwear.

When your child begins to stand, they may adopt an unusual foot position (usually the feet roll inwards). This may be helped by special boots or insoles provided by the orthotic department. Ask your GP or Community Paediatrician to refer you directly to the orthotic department where the foot position of your child will be assessed and appropriate support for your child's feet will be provided if necessary.

Once your child has received specialist boots or insoles you can contact the orthotic department directly for follow-up appointments.

