

## Paediatric physiotherapy advice for the development of crawling

### **My baby is not crawling. What should I do?**

All children are individual and will learn to do things at different times and in different ways. Not all babies will learn to crawl on all fours and may move forwards on their tummy using their elbows (commando crawling) or in sitting position (bottom shuffling). Some may not learn to crawl at all.

This guide has been developed to offer advice and suggestions to promote development of crawling.

Crawling is when a baby learns to move forwards on their hands and knees and this is usually by moving their hands and knees reciprocally (one at a time). This is the next developmental motor stage after a baby learns how to sit unaided. Crawling is a vital part of any child's development and helps to stimulate the brain and the body.

### **Crawling helps develop:**

- Independence and exploration of a child's environment
- Muscles and muscle control in the arms, shoulders, neck, legs, tummy and back
- Visual skills
- Communication between the two hemispheres (both sides) of the brain

### **When should a baby learn to crawl?**

A baby should begin to crawl (bottom shuffle/commando crawl) at aged 8-10 months. Before your baby learns to crawl he/she may rock backwards and forwards whilst taking some weight through their hands. This is how a baby builds up strength, control and balance needed in preparation for learning to crawl.

### **Activities to Encourage Crawling**

The suggestions below are suitable for babies that are already able to sit unsupported.

- It sounds simple but giving your child plenty of free time to play on the floor and also getting down next to them to play with toys/read books is a good starting place to encourage the skills needed for crawling.

- Blowing bubbles: whilst your baby is on his/her tummy catch the bubbles on the wand for your baby to reach to pop. These attempts to grasp give the child the opportunity to practice shifting their weight from one side of the body to the other. Once achieved try placing your baby on all fours (hands and knees) and continue blowing bubbles to motivate them to move forwards.
- Sit on the floor against a firm surface (wall/sofa) with one leg outstretched. Place your baby on their tummy over your lower leg making sure their legs are bent (knees under their hips) and their hands are flat on the floor, so they can push up. Once positioned use your hands to help your baby stay in this position, keeping the child's arms forward. Gently rock your child forwards and back whilst in this position so your child experiences weight transference onto their hands
- Place toys/motivating objects just out of reach to encourage your baby to crawl forwards. Push along toys such as cars or trains can be really motivating for a child to follow and promote the idea of moving in a forwards direction.
- Play games to encourage crawling through boxes, tunnels, your arms or underneath chairs

### Tips

- Continue to place your child on their tummy to play, this will help them strengthen their back and neck muscles and learn to move in and out of stationary sitting positions
- Movement into and out of sitting positions can be aided by placing toys just out of the child's grasp. Attempting to reach these toys a child will learn how to adjust/shift their body weight, pivot and balance, all the skills needed in order to learn how to crawl.
- Crawling should ideally be encouraged rather than bottom shuffling. Although it is difficult to change this once established putting your child onto their tummy or on all fours to play may promote crawling.

The order in which gross motor skills are developed is important, so if you continue to have concerns that your child is experiencing difficulties please contact your health visitor for further advice.