

10 Active Start

The importance of physical activity in the first six years of life

Activity Benchmarks - For 4, 5 and 6 Year Olds

Parents want to know

Parents and caregivers want to know what different movement and physical skills children can do by different ages. This question is often asked as "what should my child be able to do by now" or "when will my child be able to....."

Questions like this cannot be answered with any degree of certainty, although there is information available about:

1. The age by which 25% (one quarter) of children perform the skill reasonably well,
2. The **average** age when the skill appears, and
3. The age by which 90% of the children perform the skill.

A parent or caregiver should not worry if a child is unable to do a single skill (or even a couple of skills) until they are beyond the age when 90% of the children can do them. However, if a child is beyond that 90% mark in most or all skills, then it is probably wise to bring this to the attention of your health care provider (a doctor or nurse) so that an appropriate assessment of the child can take place.

As you can see, boys and girls differ in the age that they can do a particular skill, and for every skill there is a very wide range of NORMAL ages at which a skill can first appear. Being early in one skill, or later in another, has NO real meaning. It does not mean that the child is "advanced" or "slow", just that his/her body will do the skill when the body is ready.

Parents and caregivers have the responsibility to provide a safe and stimulating environment for every child to explore their movement potential. This is important for encouraging a child to try new skills for the first time.

In the first three years of life, children are able to learn new skills mainly because their bodies have become sufficiently mature. During ages 4, 5, and 6, children typically learn new skills because they have the opportunity to play in activities that promote the

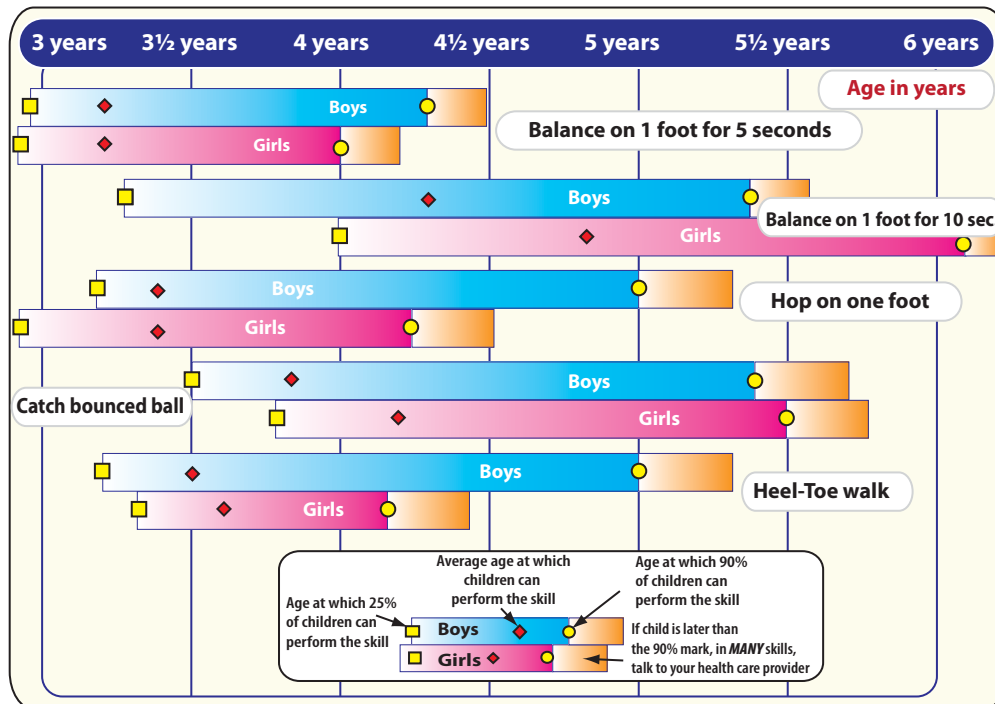
learning of those skills. As well, learning occurs when they see older children and adults using skills in a meaningful way.

Providing opportunities for children at this age to try new skills in a safe and stimulating environment will help them to develop the skills and attitudes for becoming active, healthy people throughout their lives.

Key Ideas:

Parents and caregivers should only be concerned and seek help if a child is very late in developing all or most skills. Everything else is normal!

Movement skill milestones - 3 to 6 years



Based on data from: Frankenburg, W.K., Dodds, J.B., Fandal, A.W., Kuzuk, E., & Cohrs, M. (1975). Denver Developmental Screening Test. University of Colorado Medical Centre

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