

Active movement and brain development - what's the connection?



Movement is vital for the developing brain and body of the growing child. Every movement made develops connections in the mind/body system. **Movement creates and strengthens the connections within the brain and the nerve pathways around the body.** These connections are vital for learning such as reading, writing, memory and sensory development to be able to take place.

Facts about movement and brain development:

- ✓ Physical activity fuels the brain with oxygen.
- ✓ Certain movements stimulate the inner ear - this helps physical balance and motor coordination.
- ✓ Movement decreases stress, which is critical for learning to take place.
- ✓ Visual tracking of moving objects (eg. balls) is crucial for a child's eyes to learn to work together and for vision to develop the correct connections in the brain.
- ✓ The part of the brain that processes movement is the same part of the brain that processes learning so movement helps stimulate learning.
- ✓ Increasing the difficulty of movement challenges utilises more brain cells and pathways.
- ✓ The **left side** of the brain usually works the right side of the body; the **right side** of brain usually works the left side of the body.

Active movement ideas for teachers, parents and caregivers:

1. Select movement activities that encourage children's bodies to cross the midline. For example, locomotive skills like marching encourage the use of both sides of the body. Manipulative skills like shooting hoops, catching and batting, pio, titi torea and throwing are all excellent activities for strengthening the connection between the left and right side of the body.
2. Give specific teaching and feedback to children when they are learning new skills. All children receive some type of internal feedback simply by taking part. **Positive and specific external feedback reinforces learning by providing information.** It is also a motivating factor. **Remember a child's smile is the best measure of success.**
3. Children need to be given plenty of opportunities to practice different active movement skills; a minimum of **at least 2000 times per skill** is a good benchmark.
4. Creativity requires both hemispheres of the brain to work together. Watching TV, doing computer work or reading involve two-dimensional viewing which has little to do with the right side of the brain. After these activities **do any movement that uses opposite limbs together** as this is beneficial for initiating both sides of the brain to work together again.
5. Make learning fun, **be a role model** and participate with the children.

Healthy Nibbles for Tots

Nutrition and physical activity Information for Under 5s

For more information visit: www.cph.co.nz

Date: April 2004

Code/Reference: NUT0022f

Authorised by: Nutrition and Physical Activity Team

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District Health Board
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