

## Developing Gait, Balance, and Strength in New Walkers

After your child has begun to take his first steps, you will want to help them develop their balance even more. If your child can easily take steps around the room, stop, start, turn in both directions, squat to the floor, and then resume standing, here are some activities your child may be ready for:

1. Encourage transitioning between changes in surface levels, such as taking steps from the sidewalk to grass or from a tile floor to carpeting. Assist as needed for safety. Be sure to supervise closely when going from a grassy surface to the sidewalk. Keep in mind, it is generally easier to step up onto a change in surface height and maintain balance than when stepping down, which requires a little more balance ability.



2. Walking on uneven surfaces, such as grass, or gentle inclines and downslopes. Assist as needed by holding one or two of their hands for success and safety. Gradually decrease the amount of assistance you give them as their balance improves.

3. When able, and if your child shows interest, you can have them practice kicking a medium-sized, lightweight ball while standing, while you hold both of their hands for balance. Progress to holding only one hand, and then see if they can kick a ball without support. Be sure to supervise closely, as if left unattended, your child may accidentally step on top of the ball and be moved off balance backwards, causing a fall.



4. Encourage them to "run" after you. The goal is for the speed of their steps to increase to more of a fast walk, which occurs before your child will learn to run. You can also hold both of their hands and help them kick a lightweight ball. Then, encourage them to "run" after it to kick it again. Walking with two hands held to assist down a gentle slope, such as a driveway or grassy hill, can facilitate taking faster steps because of gravity.

5. If your child does not show interest in kicking a ball, you can have them kick over a box tower. Use empty shoe boxes or other small boxes that are taped shut, and balance two or three of them on end. Assist as needed for success and safety. Keep in mind, if your child tries to stand on top of one of the boxes, the box may slide out away from them, causing them to fall backward. Supervise closely.

