



Empowering Children. Supporting Families. Building Brighter Futures.

Resource 003 | Developmental delays

Gross motor delay

What it means

Gross motor delay means slower development of large-body movements such as controlling the head, sitting, standing, walking, and changing position. It describes a developmental pattern rather than a specific disease. Quality of movement, comfort, and the ability to participate matter alongside timing. [1]

Causes and risk factors

Possible contributors include prematurity, differences in muscle tone or strength, cerebral palsy, neuromuscular conditions, genetic conditions, or vision and broader developmental difficulties. Some children vary in timing without an underlying disorder. Corrected age may be relevant after premature birth; it should not be used to dismiss persistent concerns. [1,2]

General family education. A concern deserves assessment, but this guide does not diagnose a child or prescribe treatment.



Signs and everyday impact

A child may have difficulty holding the head up, sitting steadily, moving between positions, bearing weight, or walking when expected. Marked stiffness, floppiness, consistent use of only one side, unusually tiring movement, or losing a movement skill warrants particular attention. [1,2]

Assessment and diagnosis

The clinician reviews milestones, birth and health history, growth, muscle tone, strength, reflexes, posture, and movement symmetry. A physical therapist may assess functional movement and equipment needs. Developmental testing and targeted neurological, genetic, or laboratory investigations are considered when the examination suggests an underlying condition. [1,2]

Treatment and therapy

Physical therapy often focuses on comfortable, useful movements in daily life. Occupational therapy may help positioning and play access. Medical care addresses identified causes; orthoses, seating, or mobility equipment may support participation when indicated. A walking deadline should not replace individualized goals for safety, exploration, and independence. [1,2,3]

Support at home

Provide supervised opportunities to move on a safe surface. Let the child initiate movement and use therapist-recommended positioning. Avoid forcing stretches or using equipment as treatment without professional guidance. Make play possible at the child's current movement level.

When to seek help

New or progressive weakness, loss of movement skills, or marked asymmetry requires prompt evaluation. Difficulty breathing, severe lethargy, or an acute inability to move needs urgent medical care.

Questions for your care team

- Does the examination suggest a movement disorder or muscle condition?
- Which positions and activities are safe for this child?
- Could equipment improve access to play and family routines?



Podcast preparation

Use this outline to develop a later podcast script.

Suggested opening

Welcome to Mariel Early Intervention. Today we discuss gross motor delay. Gross motor delay means slower development of large-body movements such as controlling the head, sitting, standing, walking, and changing position. This is general education; each child needs individualized care.

Opening: Define the topic and its developmental context.

Understanding: Explain causes and signs without inviting self-diagnosis.

Assessment: Describe evaluation and distinguish screening from diagnosis.

Support: Discuss treatment, therapy, and practical family supports.

Closing: Explain urgent signs and one clear next step.

Misconception to address: Crawling is not a required milestone that every child follows in the same way; the overall movement pattern is more informative.

Before recording: update clinical references and local service details, arrange clinical review, and use fully consented or fictional examples.

Terms in plain language

- Gross motor: large-body movement.
- Muscle tone: resistance of muscles to passive movement.
- Orthosis: a prescribed support such as a brace.

Sources and further reading

Sources accessed 3 October 2026. Numbered references support the clinical overview. Treatment availability and referral routes vary by country.

[1] Is Your Baby's Physical Development on Track?

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Is-Your-Babys-Physical-Development-on-Track.aspx>

[2] Developmental coordination disorder: MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001533.htm>

[3] Hypotonia: MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003298.htm>