



Empowering Children. Supporting Families. Building Brighter Futures.

Resource 024 | Movement and muscle conditions

Developmental coordination disorder

What it means

Developmental coordination disorder (DCD) involves persistent difficulty acquiring and carrying out coordinated motor skills that interferes with everyday activities. The difficulty is greater than expected for age and opportunity. A definite diagnosis is often clearer around age 5 or later; younger children can receive support without waiting for that label. [1]

Causes and risk factors

DCD is a neurodevelopmental condition involving differences in how movement is learned and coordinated. Its exact cause is often unknown. It can coexist with ADHD, language disorders, or learning difficulties. It is not diagnosed when the motor pattern is better explained by another neurological, visual, or broader developmental condition. [1,2]

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



Signs and everyday impact

Children may struggle with running, balance, ball play, utensils, dressing, drawing, or learning new movement sequences. Tasks may take much more effort. Falls and avoidance can reflect motor difficulty rather than unwillingness; difficulties vary with task demands and the child's experience. [1,2]

Assessment and diagnosis

Assessment uses developmental history, functional reports, standardized motor measures, and examination to exclude other explanations. An occupational therapist and pediatric or developmental clinician commonly contribute. Vision, attention, learning, and relevant medical findings are considered. Early motor delay alone does not automatically establish DCD. [1,2]

Treatment and therapy

Task-focused occupational or physical therapy can teach useful activities and adapt how they are performed. Practice should target goals chosen with the child and family. Environmental changes, extra time, adapted tools, and school accommodations can reduce barriers. Treatment is not simply a program to increase strength or repeat generic coordination drills. [1,2,3]

Support at home

Practice one meaningful task in small steps, with demonstration and enough time. Choose enjoyable activities where success is possible. Avoid comparisons or pressure to 'try harder.' Ask preschool or school staff to adapt tasks rather than exclude the child from movement and play.

When to seek help

Loss of skills, progressive weakness, new pain, or a suddenly unsteady gait is not typical of DCD and needs medical assessment.

Questions for your care team

- Have other medical and visual explanations been considered?
- Which everyday tasks should therapy prioritize?
- What adaptations are needed in preschool or school?



Podcast preparation

Use this outline to develop a later podcast script.

Suggested opening

Welcome to Mariel Early Intervention. Today we discuss developmental coordination disorder. Developmental coordination disorder (DCD) involves persistent difficulty acquiring and carrying out coordinated motor skills that interferes with everyday activities. 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: DCD is not laziness, and a child need not wait for a formal diagnosis to receive practical support.

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

Terms in plain language

- Coordination: organizing movements efficiently.
- Task-focused: practicing the activity that matters.
- Accommodation: changing a task or setting to improve access.

Sources and further reading

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

[1] Developmental coordination disorder: MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia

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

[2] Developmental co-ordination disorder (dyspraxia) in children - Treatment

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/developmental-coordination-disorder-dyspraxia/treatment/>

[3] 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>