

## Preschooler Fitness: Balance

Adapted from and used with permission —  
Growing Up Fit: Preschool Fitness Activities, Iowa State University

Your preschooler is ready to learn and practice new motor skills. Balance is basic to physical fitness. Balance is the ability to maintain and control body position while in place or moving. It's a learned ability that develops with experience and practice. You can help your preschooler develop this important motor skill that they will use for a lifetime.

Children develop balance from infancy until that ability stabilizes around the age of 10 or 11 years. Babies try to gain control of their bodies early in life by holding up their heads and sitting by themselves. You can challenge your preschooler to learn even more about control of their body by doing balancing activities.

Balance helps children better perform certain motor skills and enjoy movement. Try to include balance activities in your preschooler's daily activities.

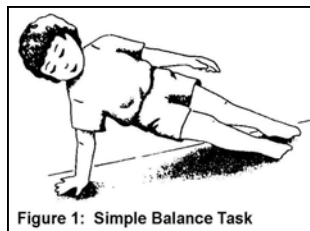


Figure 1: Simple Balance Task

Balance development progresses from simple to more difficult. Begin with simple activities and work toward more complex activities.

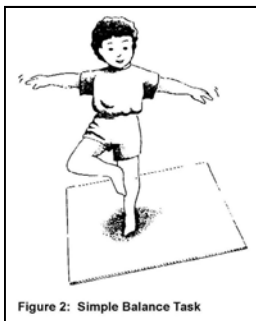


Figure 2: Simple Balance Task

Use a wide base of support and low heights for beginning balance activities. After your child is able to do simple balancing activities, move onto more challenging

balance motions. Using an approach that goes from simple to complex gives your child experience that builds confidence. Start with balancing in place. Then try balancing while moving. Even more challenging is to balance holding an object (such as a bean bag) or balancing on unstable surfaces. Start with balancing in place to help your child gain experience, confidence, and skill before moving on to more difficult balancing activities.

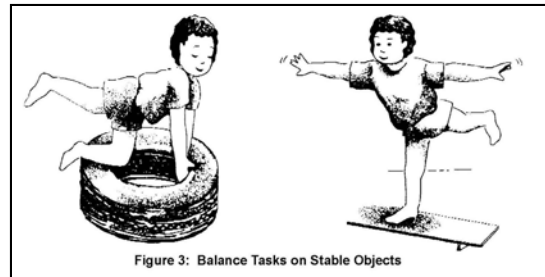


Figure 3: Balance Tasks on Stable Objects

### Body Part Balance Challenge

Call out specific body parts to balance on. Begin with the first few balance activities. Then add more challenging balance activities. Notice that there may be more than one way to do the balancing activity. Encourage your child to be creative as they do the balancing activities. Use the examples here or make up your own body part balance challenges. Invite your preschooler to call out challenges, too.

- Balance on two feet.
- Balance on two feet and one hand. (Figure 1)
- Balance on one foot. (Figure 2, Figure 3)
- Balance on one foot and two hands.
- Balance on one foot and one hand.
- Balance on two knees.

- Balance on two knees and two hands.
- Balance on one knee and two hands. (Figure 3)
- Balance on two knees and two elbows.
- Balance on two knees and one elbow.
- Balance on two knees, two hands and your head.
- Balance on two knees and your head.
- Balance on your bottom and two hands (Feet must be off the floor).
- Balance on your bottom and one hand. (Feet must be off the floor.)
- Balance on your bottom only. (Feet must be off the floor.)

Children may find balancing easier on one foot or hand than the other. Challenge your child to gain balance equally on both sides.

### Bean Bag Balance Activity

Use the bean bag activity to make balance movement progressively more challenging.

Place tape (3" width) on the floor to create a floor level balance beam. A good length is about 5-6 feet. You can make straight lines or shapes with the tape. (You can also use a 2 x 4 board. If your child gets good, try laying a 4 x 4 board across 2 x 4's, up in the air a few inches.)

Round 1: Have your preschooler walk with their feet only on the taped line in the floor. Allow a few tries until your child can easily accomplish this balancing activity.

Round 2: Place a bean bag (or other small object) in the middle of the taped line. Tell your preschooler to walk along the tape and when they come to the bean bag, to step over the bean bag. Practice until your child can easily do the balancing activity.

Round 3: Tell your preschooler to walk along the tape again. This time when they come to the bean bag, have them squat down (while still keeping their feet only on the tape), and pick up the bean bag and walk the rest of the way on the balance beam. Or, have your child turn around to go back to the start.

Prepared by: Joan E. LeFebvre, Professor, Department of Family Development, University of Wisconsin-Extension  
 Reviewer: Dave Riley, Extension Specialist, Child Development and Early Education, UW-Madison  
 Layout: Penny Otte, Office Operations Associate, Family Living Area Office, Vilas County

Round 4: In this round, have your preschooler walk along the tape, pick up the bean bag, and carry the bean bag in different ways. Have them carry the bean bag on their shoulder, on the top of their foot, or on their head.

### Difficult Balancing Challenges

The most difficult balancing challenges use unstable equipment (Figure 4) such as balance boards, stilts made from coffee cans or foam blocks, or play items like skateboards or roller skates. If your child has good motor development, vary the challenges with equipment that has a wide base, narrow base, low base or high base and move from balancing self to balancing self and small objects while on the equipment.

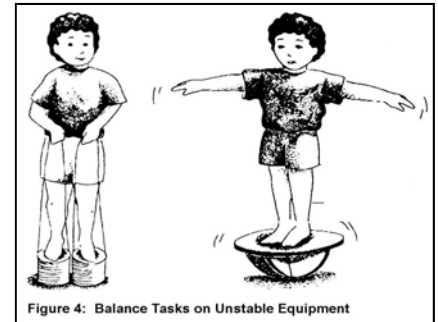


Figure 4: Balance Tasks on Unstable Equipment

### Safety Tips

- Supervise and assist your preschooler during balance activities.
- Do balance activities on stable surfaces such as a mat or room-sized rug.
- Stabilize equipment to keep it firmly in place.
- Be sure equipment is free of sharp corners, rough edges, nails.
- If you do activities with more than one child, remind them to take turns and not interfere with or distract others.

### References:

- Pfeiffer, K. (n.d.) *Bean bag balance activities*. Retrieved March 17, 2009, from <http://fitness.preschoolrock.com/index.php/activities/balance-activities-with-bean-bags-or-bean-bag-animals>
- Pfeiffer, K. (n.d.) *Body part balance challenge – preschool fitness activity*. Retrieved March 17, 2009, from <http://fitness.preschoolrock.com/index.php/activities/body-part-balance-challenge---preschool-fitness-activity>
- Rupnow, A., & Morain, V. (2000). *Growing up fit: Preschool fitness activities*. Retrieved March 17, 2009 from <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1359B.pdf>

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For more information on Parenting and Child Development, contact: Joan E. LeFebvre, Area Family Living Agent, University of Wisconsin, Extension, 330 Court Street, Courthouse, Eagle River WI 54521-8362, 715-479-3653, FAX 715-479-3605, E-Mail joan.lefebvre@ces.uwex.edu  
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