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NEWSLETTER

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The effects of W-sitting on a child's development

Children sit in various positions when engaging in active play, one of which is the W-sitting position. This position is when a child sits with their bottom completely on the ground in between their legs, knees bent, and feet spread to the side. Due to the legs maintaining this position, it creates a larger base of support for the child, which in return decreases core strength (Integrated Learning Strategies, 2016). Without a strong core, a child may have inadequate shoulder and wrist stability, which could hinder the development of their fine motor skills (Child Development Centre, 2019). Researchers have noticed that this position arises at the age of three years and can disappear as the child grows, but some children never shake the habit.

The effects of W-sitting:

As the child maintains this position, they find it challenging to reach items that are out of their immediate reach, as they are unable to execute active trunk rotation and shift their weight across both sides. This can be easily explained as the child reaching for a toy with the hand that is closest to the toy, rather than using their dominant hand. This can lead to a child not gaining understanding of their dominant side – i.e., should I hold a pencil in my left hand or right hand? The child will also start to write with the left hand, for instance, and shift the pencil to the right hand due to the difficulty of crossing the midline. For children to be able to cross their midline, develop reflexes, and access the mobility required to reach other significant developmental milestones, they must be able to shift their weight and rotate around their center point. If they are unable to do this, however, the child will experience a delay in bilateral coordination, which is known as the ability of the child to effectively use both sides of the body simultaneously and in return challenge the child's fine motor skills such as writing, cutting, buttoning their shirts, or utilizing utensils during meals. Due to extra stress being placed on the hip and knee joints, it can also lead to long-term postural problems as well as lower back pain. It leads to the tightening and shortening of leg muscles, which can result in 'pigeon-toed' walking (turning in of the feet). This can in turn impact the child's abilities in various gross-motor activities such as jumping, running, climbing, or riding a bike.

Why does W-sitting occur?

Children with weak core muscles tend to sit in this position as it provides them with a wider base of support. It allows the child to use less muscles to maintain balance. Some children have anatomical differences, which include femoral anteversion. This position can simply be comfortable for the child, but over time leads to muscle tightness, making it uncomfortable for them to sit in any other way. For many children it is simply a habit.

Helpful tips:

Encourage your child to sit in other positions, such as:

- Sitting with legs crossed (try to alternate which leg is on top)
- Butterfly-sitting (both legs bent with feet touching)
- Side-sitting (knees bent, both feet on the same side of the body)
- Sitting with legs straight in front
- Kneeling or squatting
- Lying on the stomach

Role of the Kinderkineticist:

A Kinderkineticist can pinpoint the challenges the child is facing and optimise the child's overall movement, preventing further challenges in terms of development by introducing remedial lessons once or twice every week. The Kinderkineticist can refer the child to another health professional if the issue is beyond their scope.

"Play is the highest form of research"

Albert Einstein

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Activities:

- By taking part in the Kinderkinetics lessons, the child's gross motor skills can be brought up to standard by playing the farming game. Here, the child is required to hop like a bunny, walk like a monkey forwards and backwards, walk like a bear, hop like a frog, and run forwards and backwards while fetching the bean bags (food) on the other side of the room.

- The other challenge will be to remediate and optimize the core muscles while combining this with bilateral coordination by doing strengthening exercises such as sitting on a bosu ball while transferring bean bags from the left to the right side by using both hands and repeating it from right to left.

- The child's balance as a whole can be optimized by doing dynamic balance exercises such as walking on a rope on the floor as well as static balance exercises such as standing still on the rope with one foot placed in front of the other for 10 seconds.

- Leg strengthening exercises can be combined with core activation exercises such jumping on a trampoline. The child might find this easier as the mat absorbs most of the impact.

- In addition, midline crossing can be combined with balance, hand–eye coordination and core strengthening by allowing a child to climb up, over and under obstacles.

About the Author:

Marion van der Merwe is a registered Kinderkineticist employed at Haptic Hands in Windhoek, Namibia. The practice has been up and running for six years. The focus of the practice is primarily on remedial lessons, movement lessons, baby stimulation as well as swimming lessons. Contact them today for further information.

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