



Is My Child Clumsy?

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Does your child have difficulties in school with seemingly simple motor tasks such as running, using scissors or fastening the buttons on his sweater? Does she seem to be “accident prone” or have difficulty with self feeding during meal times? Does he shy away from competitive physical activities?

It has been reported in literature that five to fifteen percent of the population has concerns similar to those above - excessive “clumsiness” or “awkwardness”. In the past various terms have been used to describe these children, including “Clumsy Child Syndrome”, “Perceptuo-motor Dysfunction”, “Minimal Brain Dysfunction”, “Motor Learning Difficulty” and “Sensorimotor Dysfunction”. Professionals and researchers now use the term “Developmental Coordination disorder (DCD)” to describe these children.

These children have usually achieved their motor milestones within the normal limits. More boys are affected than girls and it is not related to the level of education or socioeconomic status. The difficulties are significant enough to interfere with academic performance and social integration. There is strong evidence supporting the fact that these difficulties do not disappear with increasing age. Children are usually diagnosed between the ages of six and twelve years, and rarely before the age of five.

Clumsiness has been described as an inability to perform simple physical tasks smoothly and efficiently. As a result, children with DCD tend to drop things, bump into chairs and people, are messy during mealtimes and find it difficult to complete everyday tasks such as getting dressed or keeping their desks organized. They perform poorly at sports, often find it difficult to make friends and may suffer from low self esteem and depression.

The good news is that there are health care professionals in your community who can help your child develop the skills that are important to them. Occupational and Physical therapists specializing in the assessment of children’s motor skills are available to provide a better understanding of the motor difficulties. Based on an assessment, they will help the family develop strategies to assist the child. This might include such things as learning to think about and plan their movements or talking themselves through movements. They may need to break tasks down into smaller steps. Strategies can be provided to the child’s school to ensure increased success in the classroom. Adapted equipment can be recommended/provided as needed.

Years ago people were told “Don’t worry – they’ll grow out of it”. We now recognize that “clumsiness” is not necessarily something that children will grow out of, and can have long-term implications that may have an impact on the child academically, socially and physically. If you feel that your child fits into the criteria for Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) and you would like to investigate further, contact an Occupational or Physical Therapist who specializes in the assessment and treatment of children.

For a list of therapists, contact:

- The Society of Alberta Occupational Therapists (SAOT)
www.saot.ca
- Alberta Physiotherapy Association
www.albertaphysio.org



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