

Definition

Muscle tone refers to the amount of tension in a muscle. Muscle tone is what enables us to keep our bodies in a certain position or posture. Changes in muscle tone is what enables us to move.

Low tone is used to describe muscles that have less tension and feel floppy. A child with low muscle tone may need to exert more effort when doing an activity to activate her muscles. As a result she may have difficulty maintaining a good posture when sitting or standing and may get tired easily due to the extra effort she is required to use.

Warm-up activities can help increase muscle tone by activating the muscles. These activities however, will not lead to a permanent change in your child's muscle tone. Encourage your child to do a warm-up activity before doing an everyday activity. For example, bouncing on a mini trampoline (Figure 1) before sitting at a table to draw may help your child to sit up straight rather than slouch (Figure 2). Squeezing and rolling playdough before writing may help your child to maintain her hold on the pencil and write for a longer period of time.



Figure 1: Bouncing on a trampoline.



Figure 2: A good sitting posture.

Helpful strategies

- ▶ Give your child feedback when he is doing activities to help him develop awareness of his muscle tone and posture. For example, if he is slouching whilst doing his homework (Figure 3), remind him to sit up straight, and have his bottom back in the chair (Figure 2).
- ▶ Do a warm-up activity before an everyday activity to temporarily increase muscle tone. This will help your child feel what it is like to do an activity with a better posture.
- ▶ Make activities fun and exciting as this can help increase your child's level of alertness and muscle tone. For example, encourage your child using a loud and positive voice. Use loud, upbeat music when doing warm-up activities.
- ▶ If your child is slouching after he has started an activity get him to stop what he is doing and do 10 star jumps (Figure 4) to activate his muscles.

Please talk to your occupational therapist if you have any queries about the above information.



Figure 3: A poor sitting posture.

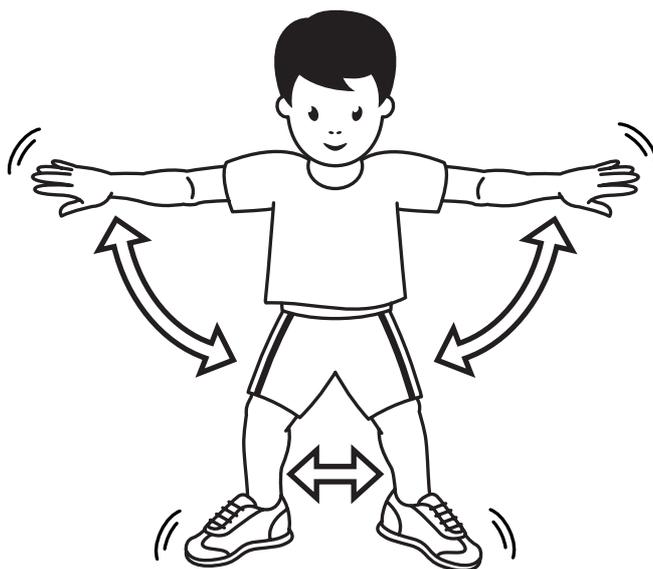
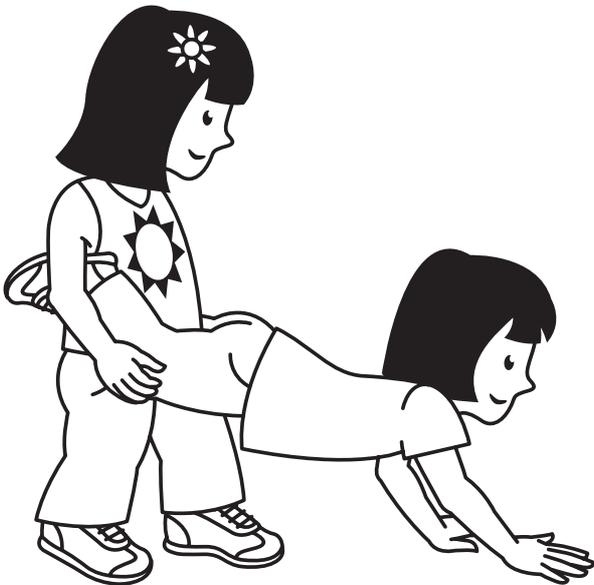


Figure 4: Star jumps.

General warm-up activities

- ▶ Mini trampoline – encourage your child to bounce to loud upbeat music and keep her interested by varying how she bounces. For example bouncing and clapping, bouncing and twisting, jumping backwards and forwards, star jumps, etc.
- ▶ Wheelbarrow walks – hold your child at her hips or knees whilst she walks on her hands (when your child is strong enough hold at her ankles). Motivate your child by encouraging her to go further each time. Vary the activity by getting her to carry something on her back or set up an obstacle course such as going over a cushion or around a table.



- ▶ Space hopper – encourage your child to bounce on a space hopper in the backyard or up and down the hallway.
- ▶ Running on the spot, stomping, star jumps, skipping with a skipping rope.



- ▶ Crawling activities, crab walks, bear walks, bunny hops – make it fun by setting up an obstacle course, relay or race.
- ▶ Tug of war – use a dressing gown cord or twist a bathroom towel to make a rope. Play tug of war with your child either sitting, standing or kneeling.
- ▶ Play ball games – catching, throwing, bouncing, aiming at targets.

Please talk to your occupational therapist if you have any queries about the above activity ideas.

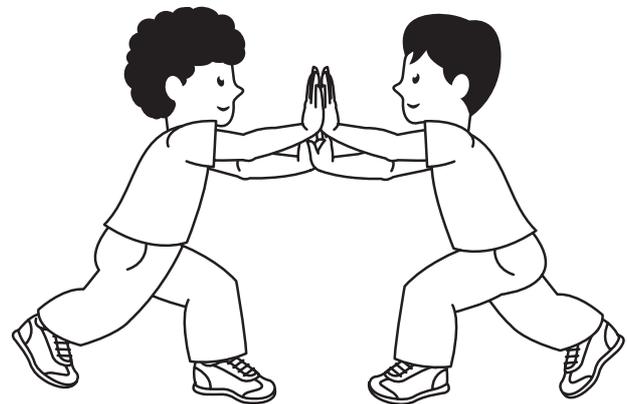
Arm and hand warm-up activities

- ▶ Playdough, plasticine or theraputty – roll, pinch, squeeze, pound and make sausages, balls and pinch pots. To keep your child motivated, ask him to make as many sausages/balls as he can in one minute.



- ▶ Newspaper scrunch – scrunch up sheets of newspaper into balls. Once a few balls have been made get your child to throw them into a bin or at a target.
- ▶ Squeeze soft balls, sponges or face washers – encourage him to squeeze 10 times or as many times as he can in one minute to make it fun.
- ▶ Tong relay – pick up small toys or objects with a pair of tongs and run and place them in a container. Time your child and see if he can do it quicker next time.
- ▶ Spray bottles – water plants or make pictures by squirting water on the concrete.
- ▶ Dig a small patch in the garden.
- ▶ Arm wrestles – sit opposite your child with elbows on the table. Hold each other's hands and encourage your child to push against your resistance. Alternatively, try thumb wrestling.

- ▶ Place a ball in some old stockings and hang it from the clothesline or a tree branch. Encourage your child to hold onto a rolling pin and hit the ball 10 times. Increase the number of hits as he develops strength and endurance.



- ▶ Stand opposite your child and place the palms of your hands against your child's hands. Try pushing each other over.
- ▶ Carrying shopping bags.
- ▶ Hammering activities.

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