

TEACHING A CHILD TO WALK.

Contributed by Webmaster
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Exercise is essentially important to the health of the infant. Its first exercise, of course, will be in the nurse's arms. After a month or two, when it begins to sleep less during the day, it will delight to roll and kick about on the sofa: it will thus use its limbs freely; and this, with carrying out into the open air, is all the exercise it requires at this period. By and by, however, the child will make its first attempts to walk. Now it is important that none of the many plans which have been devised to teach a child to walk, should be adopted the go-cart, leading-strings, etc.; their tendency is mischievous; and flatness of the chest, confined lungs, distorted spine, and deformed legs, are so many evils which often originate in such practices. This is explained by the fact of the bones in infancy being comparatively soft and pliable, and if prematurely subjected by these contrivances to carry the weight of the body, they yield just like an elastic stick bending under a weight, and as a natural consequence become curved and distorted.

It is highly necessary that the young and experienced mother should recollect this fact, for the early efforts of the little one to walk are naturally viewed by her with so much delight, that she will be apt to encourage and prolong its attempts, without any thought of the mischief which they may occasion; thus many a parent has had to mourn over the deformity which she has herself created.

It may be as well here to remark, that if such distortion is timely noticed, it is capable of correction, even after evident curvature has taken place. It is to be remedied by using those means that shall invigorate the frame, and promote the child's general health (a daily plunge into the cold bath, or sponging with cold salt water, will be found signally efficacious), and by avoiding the original cause of the distortion never allowing the child to get upon his feet. The only way to accomplish the latter intention, is to put both the legs into a large stocking; this will effectually answer this purpose, while, at the same time, it does not prevent the free and full exercise of the muscles of the legs. After some months pursuing this plan, the limbs will be found no longer deformed, the bones to have acquired firmness and the muscles strength; and the child may be permitted to get upon his feet again without any hazard of perpetuating or renewing the evil.

The best mode of teaching a child to walk, is to let it teach itself, and this it will do readily enough. It will first crawl about: this exercises every muscle in the body, does not fatigue the child, throws no weight upon the bones, but imparts vigour and strength, and is thus highly useful. After a while, having the power, it will wish to do more: it will endeavour to lift itself upon its feet by the aid of a chair, and though it fail again and again in its attempts, it will still persevere until it accomplish it. By this it learns, first, to raise itself from the floor; and secondly, to stand, but not without keeping hold of the object on which it has seized. Next it will balance itself without holding, and will proudly and laughingly show that it can stand alone. Fearful, however, as yet of moving its limbs without support, it will seize a chair or anything else near it, when it will dare to advance as far as the limits of its support will permit. This little adventure will be repeated day after day with increased exultation; when, after numerous trials, he will feel confident of his power to balance himself, and he will run alone. Now time is required for this gradual self-teaching, during which the muscles and bones become strengthened; and when at last called upon to sustain the weight of the body, are fully capable of doing so.

Exercise during childhood.

When the child has acquired sufficient strength to take active exercise, he can scarcely be too much in the open air; the more he is habituated to this, the more capable will he be of bearing the vicissitudes of the climate. Children, too, should always be allowed to amuse themselves at pleasure, for they will generally take that kind and degree of exercise which is best calculated to promote the growth and development of the body. In the unrestrained indulgence of their youthful sports, every muscle of the body comes in for its share of active exercise; and free growth, vigour, and health are the result.

If, however, a child is delicate and strumous, and too feeble to take sufficient exercise on foot, and to such a constitution the respiration of a pure air and exercise are indispensable for the improvement of health, and without them all other efforts will fail, riding on a donkey or pony forms the best substitute. This kind of exercise will always be found of infinite service to delicate children; it amuses the mind, and exercises the muscles of the whole body, and yet in so gentle a manner as to induce little fatigue.

The exercises of horseback, however, are most particularly useful where there is a tendency in the constitution to pulmonary consumption, either from hereditary or accidental causes. It is here beneficial, as well through its influence on the general health, as more directly on the lungs themselves. There can be no doubt that the lungs, like the muscles of the body, acquire power and health of function by exercise. Now during a ride this is obtained, and without much fatigue to the body. The free and equable expansion of the lungs by full inspiration, necessarily takes place; this maintains their healthy structure, by keeping all the air-passages open and pervious; it prevents congestion in the pulmonary circulation, and at the same time provides more completely for the necessary chemical action on the blood, by changing, at each act of respiration, a sufficient proportion of the whole air contained in the lungs, all objects of great importance, and all capable of being promoted, more or less, by the means in question.