



The Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists

APCP Information – Babies Who Bottom Shuffle

Information for Parents and Carers

What is bottom shuffling?

Children who bottom shuffle tend to sit on their bottoms and move themselves around using their legs. Children bottom shuffle in a variety of ways:

- They may use their arms to propel themselves.
- They lean to the side and using one arm and leg.
- They may use both legs together and some bounce.



Typically, children who bottom shuffle use this method rather than crawling. They may not like playing on their tummy or be reluctant to take weight through their legs. They may lift their legs up when you attempt to support them in standing. Most bottom shufflers are “late walkers”.

Please note: If your child is not taking weight on their legs by 18 months old, please speak to your health visitor or GP.

Is it normal for children to bottom shuffle?

Yes! Children can reach their developmental milestones early and others much later. Some may miss developmental milestones all together, such as crawling. Some children will learn to bottom shuffle instead. This is a normal variant.

Why do some children bottom shuffle?

Some children may not tolerate being placed on their tummy and therefore may not develop the strength in their arms, neck and back muscles to enable them to push themselves up, move around on their tummy or crawl.

Some children may prefer to lie on their back or to be supported in a sitting position. They may be reluctant to roll from their back onto their side or their tummy. This makes it very difficult for them to learn to sit themselves up from a lying or crawling position. Some children may have joints that are more supple/flexible than average.

This makes it more difficult for them to take weight through their arms and legs, making it harder to crawl, stand and step.

Children who bottom shuffle can move very quickly and their hands are free to hold and play with toys. Therefore, they often have little motivation to pull up to stand on their feet or use their arms to crawl.

How can I help my child?

Continue with tummy time when your child is awake and supervised.

This will help them learn to take weight through their arms and become stronger in their upper body, making it easier for them to sit themselves up from lying and crawl.

Don't be discouraged if your child dislikes tummy time initially. With practice, encouragement and interaction, your baby will start to enjoy being on their tummy.

If they do not tolerate lying flat on the floor, give them some support under their chest using a rolled-up towel. You can lay them across your legs. You can also sit on the sofa, lean back and lay your child on your chest. You can progress to lying on the floor with your child on your chest.

Encourage your child to shuffle over obstacles on the floor, such as over your legs or cushions, so that they have to bring their weight forwards onto their arms to move themselves forwards.

Help your child to kneel

Encourage your child to pull themselves up onto their knees, against you or on a piece of furniture. Kneeling helps to improve strength around the hips and lower body.

As your child becomes more stable in kneeling, you can help them to stand up. Sit on the floor behind your child, place one of their feet flat on the floor then hold them around their hips so that the child feels secure. Then help guide them up into standing.



Help your child to take weight through their legs

Kneel or sit on the floor with your legs crossed.

Sit your child on your lap with their legs over yours and their knees bent so that their feet are flat on the floor. If your child tends to lean backwards, use your body to keep their back straight and leaning forwards slightly.

Encourage your child to lean forwards to reach for toys. Progress to reaching down to retrieve objects from the floor.



Help your child to pull to stand from your lap

Kneel or sit cross legged on the floor in front of a sofa or low piece of furniture that does not move. Sit your child on your lap with their legs over yours and their knees bent so that their feet are flat on the floor.

Place an interesting toy on the sofa/furniture surface. Encourage your child to reach forwards for the toy. Then move their hips forwards and up, over their feet, supporting them around their hips with your hands as they straighten their knees. You can help them learn to sit down by bringing their hips back and down onto your lap.

Bottom shufflers tend to try to stand with their bottom behind their feet so they need help to bring their hips forwards, over their feet. Encourage them to lean their tummy against the sofa/furniture. When your child learns to stand up independently you no longer need to support them around their hips.



Will a 'sit in' baby walker or baby bouncer help my child learn to stand and walk?

No. These do not help children to learn to stand or walk. They have also been the cause of many serious accidents. Please refer to the APCP Babywalker leaflet.

When to seek further advice or help from health professionals

- If your child has difficulty moving their arms or legs, for example if they appear to be weak, floppy or stiff.
- If your child appears to be using one side of their body more than the other. This may be their arm or leg, or have a strong preference to turn their head to one side

- If your child always falls to one side or backwards when they lose their balance.
- If your child is unable to bring one or both feet flat on the floor in standing, or if their foot position is very different on both feet
- If your child shows significant delay in other areas of their development, for example play and language, fine motor skills, vision or hearing.

If You Need Further Advice About Tummy Time, or Have Concerns About Your Baby’s Development, Contact Your Health Visitor Or Children’s Physiotherapist.

This leaflet has been produced after an initial review of literature and where there is a lack of evidence, a consensus of expert opinion is agreed, correct at time of publication. APCP <https://apcp.csp.org.uk>

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The Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists (APCP) is one of the CSP’s largest Professional Networks and continues to thrive with a membership of over 2,900 paediatric members. We encourage our members and support staff to work together to enhance the quality of life, wellbeing and independence of babies’, children, and young people that we deliver care to. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) is the professional, educational and trade union body for the UK’s 64,000 chartered physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and support workers.



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