

THE FINGER WALK

Dr. Ronald Watkins, D.C., Ph.C, C.C.R.

What could a “finger walk” possibly have to do with child development? It is a method by which your child or grandchild can walk sooner, talk earlier and learn faster. Many children are unknowingly slowed in their development simply because some movements and exercises were denied to them.

Do you recall the “Crossed Pattern’ exercise of coordinated crawling which was clearly demonstrated to induce rapid improvement in retarded children? Dr. Hudson Hoagland at Wooster institute of Experimental Biology in Massachusetts did one of the earliest convincing projects of this. Dr. Delacato and others have given similar coordinated neuromuscular training which has been very helpful. Yet, what about the apparently normal child? Can he do his best without any training? How do you know that he is normal? Slightly retarded children are usually not discovered until much later than the first year.

You can start a training program which will enhance graceful development long before the child can crawl. You can start the first day of life with this training. The proper name is “Proprioceptive Facilitation to Enhance Neuromuscular Dexterity.” Dexterity is the basis of a pianist’s finger motion, of an acrobat’s agility, of a skater’s precision. All of us know that neuromuscular refers to muscular movement and the nerves that drive the muscles. Proprioception is not such a common term. This is the special sense by which we know, even with the eyes closed, whether a hand is open, closed, overhead or pendant. Without this same proprioceptive sensation from the feet and legs, we could not stand with the eyes closed, we would fall over. Hence this is the neurological basis for all skilled movements.

Every muscle has thousands of special nerve endings sensitive to stretching, load and tension. These are sending reports to the spinal cord at a frequency up to one thousand per second from each one of these thousands of “observation stations.” Every joint has thousands of similar endings responding to pressure and load. They too are sending reports continually at millions per second when we are asleep. They are reporting at very high frequencies when we are moving about with thousands of millions per second. Fortunately we don’t have to sort out consciously the millions of messages per second and make the proper adaptation to the changes of position. This is done by our “super-computers” in the unconscious part of the brain and spinal cord. Still this reporting, this continual adjusting and re-adjusting of hundreds of muscles must be done in ore order to make any skilled movements.

When a baby is born, the synapses, the spark gaps between individual nerve cells are relatively open. Starting any thought or action the first time is not easy. When an act is repeated, there is a growth of the nerve to close this gap and to form more parallel gaps so that if one gets tired, the traffic can go over the other alternate routes. This makes every repetition easier and is hence called “facilitation.” The actual growth process of the nerve is call “neurobiotaxis.” Thus we can see that there is an actual physical basis for habit patterns. The more anything is repeated the easier it is to accomplish. With any skill we must use it or lose it. Handwriting is a classic example. So is standing and walking. Now the question again. How does a finger walk help one to sit, stand and walk both sooner and better?

When the child is first put up on the shoulder, long before he can even hold up the head, you can start training every joint in that spinal column. Two fingers placed astride the spinal column, finger tips together, can be lightly pressed to barely move that joint. Now move one finger up about 1/4 inch and press with the tip, repeating with each finger as it advances. This will be a definite walking action with

the finger tips, not through the yellow pages but up the spinal column. Every light finger tip pressure will gently move the joint and send a flood of impulses, proprioceptive reports, to the spinal cord. You will feel the muscles shift under the fingers with each step. Part of these reports go right up to the conscious brain so that the child is increasingly aware that he has a spine and that it moves. The child will squirm, wiggle and giggle as this is very gently done for about one minute every morning and every night. With this very simple method of exercise, enriched development will be taking place daily. The child will grow and develop at his maximum speed without retardation (if no subluxations are present). Generally, they will sit sooner, stand sooner, walk sooner and more gracefully besides learning to talk sooner. This may not sound possible but many parents have written to verify these findings. One couple has two children, both slightly retarded. They used the crossed-pattern crawling and the Delacato exercises. Both helped somewhat. With their third and fourth children, they started much sooner with the finger walking exercise. Obviously you can start very much earlier with this game. Both these later children did show much earlier learning patterns of every muscular action and much better total mental accomplishment.

When the child is on the shoulder, it is very easy to do this finger walk. When the child is lying prone, it is also easy. This should be done several times every day. As soon as the child can sit up, you can clasp the hands around the waist and use the thumb tips to do the same walk up the spinal column. This can be continued daily for years, in fact, no one is too old to benefit from a few minutes each day from a similar walking exercise. Traditionally, the Bohemians had trained bears to walk up and down the back of adults. Some persons did a similar hand walk up the back which in that country developed into a system called "Napravy." In some countries the mother will hold the small children by the hands so that the child can walk up and down Dad's back when he comes home all tired.

The benefits for adults have been known in many countries for many years but the explanations have varied. Now it is definitely shown to be very helpful with development of very young children. It can be used effectively from 9 days to 90 years without harm if done gently. There will be instances when one area is very stiff or sore after some injury. These will require professional attention. Still every layman can help his own family to remain flexible, to develop at maximum speed and to develop the physical agility which can be trained. Such children can become much more graceful and physically adept. All will be more adaptable and hence will be healthier and more intelligent. That is worth trying.

Don't delay your child's development. Play the game. The name of the game is "Finger Walk".