



## Sunshine Coast Occupational Therapy Inc.

*Paediatrics, Geriatrics & Ergonomics*

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### **BICYCLE RIDING**

For a child to begin to ride a two wheel bicycle they must first have developed the foundation skills necessary, which include muscle tone, balance, stability, bilateral coordination, motor planning, and body awareness. Without all of these skills, bicycle riding may be very difficult and scary for a child.

Our society has also changed the rules for our young children by making two wheel bicycles so small now that we tend to skip over the developmental stage of the tricycle. Developmentally a child has not obtained the skills necessary to independently ride a two wheel bicycle until the age of six to seven years, and for children with motor delays this may be later. With the use of the tricycle or other riding toys with pedals, the child has the opportunity to practice the coordination of his feet without having to also worry about balance and stability.

The skills necessary before riding a bike are:

- standing on one foot for 10 seconds
- walking backwards toe-to-heel for six to 10 steps
- gallops without difficulty
- jump rope five to 10 consecutive times
- jump backwards two to five consecutive times
- hop a distance of 50 feet on preferred foot
- run forward and kick a rolled ball
- walk a balance beam backwards toe-to-heel
- throw a ball with a mature skilled form, shifts weight, and horizontal abduction of the arm.

Before riding a two wheel bicycle, they should have plenty of opportunity to develop their muscle tone, coordination and balance through the use of playground activities and riding toys. If they have difficulty or delays in the development of the foundation skills, it may be longer before they are ready to ride a bike.

When buying a bike for a young child, it is important to have the first one small enough for them to feel secure on and they can touch the ground with two flat feet. Although it makes sense to buy one big enough to last a few years, for the beginning rider it is more important for them to feel secure. A helmet, knee and elbow pads may prove beneficial. Training wheels are an important part of the first two wheel bicycle especially if the child does not have the foundation skills.

When first learning to ride, a young child is not able to work on the development of balance, coordination and endurance at the same time, therefore, stable training wheels will help them feel secure when first learning to pedal.

After a child is comfortable pedaling a tricycle or small bicycle with training wheels, it is time to go on to the two wheeler without training wheels. Teaching to ride independently on a bike needs to occur backwards. First the child must feel secure on the bike, especially when he is moving, so it is necessary

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teach him to stop. While pushing the bike forward, have the child put both feet out to the ground to stop the bike, otherwise they panic and jump off, throwing the bike down and getting hurt. Once they feel secure in putting both feet out and staying upright, have them begin to push back on the pedals then put one or both feet out for stability. After mastering stopping it is time to go on to riding forward, combining pedaling and balance. Working on a flat surface it will be necessary to provide stability at first while the child develops a feel for balancing. Once they feel fairly secure with balancing, the support can be slowly decreased. After the child becomes proficient in riding and stopping then he will begin to learn to balance himself for starting from a stationary position.

Some activities to promote the bilateral coordination for pedaling are suggested below:

- jump rope
- hopping games: hop in and out of circles, over items, hopscotch, hop on one foot then the other, hop long distance on one foot (observe whether the feet work together or one foot leads for hopping, can the feet move reciprocally)
- bunny hop games – into and out of open ended cartons, over obstacles
- Indian dances
- Tie Up – tie ankles together by using inner tube band, move around an obstacle course by hopping
- water skiing – while sitting on a carpet square on smooth surface or scooter on carpet, pull by rope around the floor (observe if they are able to maintain stability or pull off to one side and fall over)
- Ring Jump – with both feet together and arms moving together, children jump through a series of hula hoops held in a horizontal or vertical position several inches off the ground and several feet apart.
- Ice Skating – children put on pretend ice or roller skates, simply stand in shoe boxes or on two pieces of paper. Have the child experiment with them. Skate following a path around a circle. Skate backwards. Play follow the leader, etc.