

# FACTSHEET

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## Role of the treating team in Spina Bifida: Physiotherapy

Most children living with Spina Bifida are given the chance to walk. The physiotherapist's role is to:

1. Maximise independent mobility
2. Encourage participation in regular physical activity.

This relationship will continue from birth into the teenage years. At different stages the focus of physiotherapy will change.

### Infants

The physiotherapist will meet you and your child as soon after birth as possible. The purpose of this will be to assess your baby's ability to move their legs and also the position of their legs.

Babies who have Spina Bifida are sometimes born with musculo-skeletal problems in their legs. This is managed by serial casting (plasters), splinting, stretches and exercises under the supervision of the physiotherapist.

Advice will be given to you about how to stimulate normal motor development. Information about how to hold and position your baby to make the most of independent mobility in their first year will also be provided.

### Toddlers

The physiotherapist will see your child at the outpatient Spina Bifida Service. They will regularly monitor your child's lower limb muscle strength, posture and motor milestones

How often your child needs to attend physiotherapy will be discussed with you. During these early years the physiotherapist will work with your family to maximise and stimulate normal gross motor development of your child. Babies and toddlers with Spina Bifida can develop slower than other children. They may need extra help to learn some skills compared to other children

### Pre Schoolers

The focus at this stage is on achieving upright mobility. This is done through standing and assisted walking. Often orthoses are needed. They are splints that support the child's feet and legs. Walking aides such as frames may also be used.

The physiotherapist may need to visit your child's pre-school or day-care centre to educate staff about gross motor development and how best to promote walking and independence.

### School Age

The physiotherapist may need to visit your child's school before they start. This is to check the environment is right to allow full participation in all school activities. Support may be provided to the school staff regarding your child's needs and to ensure enough aide time is allocated to your child.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important for all children and adolescents living with Spina Bifida. The physiotherapist can give advice about sport and fitness activities to support this at all ages.