

***Exercising at
Home***



4 Important Exercises for Children with Autism

- For children with autism, studies show that vigorous activity for more than 20 minutes can help decrease stereotypical behaviors, hyperactivity, and aggression. Exercise not only helps children with autism better engage in the environment, but it also helps promote weight loss and leads to better overall health.
- Full-body exercises are best for children with autism to increase coordination, strength, endurance, and body awareness. Here are four exercises to try.
- **Tips for getting started**
- When teaching a child with autism a new exercise, it's important to do so in a calm and supportive environment. Use positive reinforcement such as "You're doing a great job!" Also use verbal or hands-on cues to help guide them through the movements and decrease the chances of them getting frustrated and upset.

Bear Crawls (see next slide for an example of this exercise)

Bear crawls help develop body awareness, improve coordination and motor planning, and build strength in the trunk and upper body.

1. Start by kneeling on all fours, with hands under shoulders and knees under hips.
2. Extend legs until slightly bent. Spread your fingers wide to have optimal contact with the floor.
3. Walk using your feet and hands across the floor approximately 10-20 feet.
4. Maintain this position and walk backward in the same fashion.
5. Try switching up the speed and direction for optimal results.
6. If this movement is too hard, hands-on guidance at the hips from an adult can help.

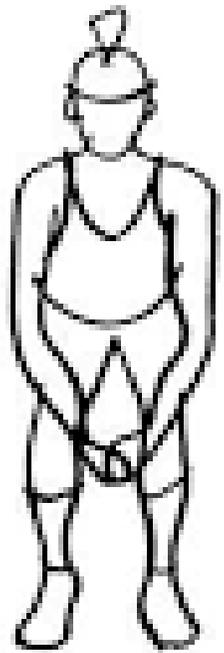
Bear Crawls



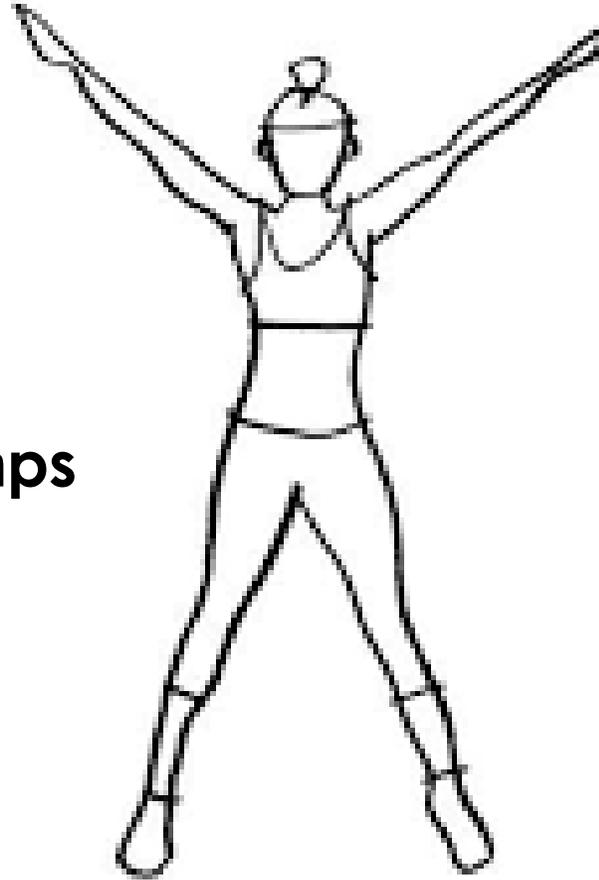
Star Jumps (see next slide for an example of this exercise)

Jumping tasks are a great full-body exercise that help improve cardiovascular endurance, strengthen legs and the core, and increase body awareness. Star jumps can be performed anywhere and can be done one at a time or in multiple repetitions.

1. Begin in a squatting position with knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and arms tucked in toward the chest.
 2. Quickly jump up from squatting, extending arms and legs wide into an X.
 3. On landing, return to starting position with arms and legs tucked in.
- Repeat for up to 20 repetitions or until fatigued.



Star Jumps

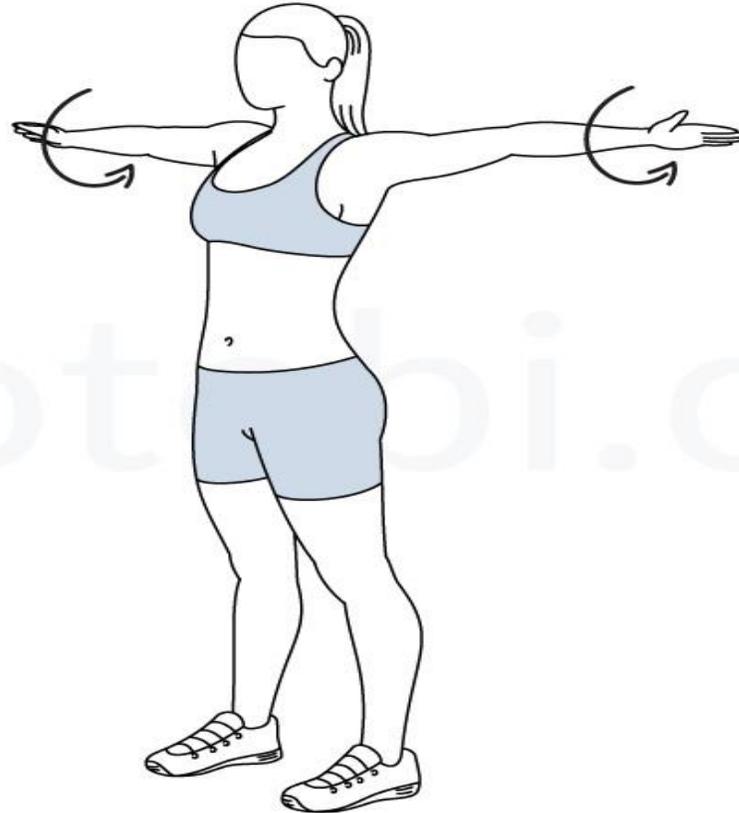


Arm Circles (see next slide for an example of this exercise)

In a study published in [Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders](#), the authors found that movements similar to those exhibited by those with autism may help provide needed feedback to the body. This may reduce repetitive behaviors such as arm flapping or clapping. Arm circles are a great upper-body exercise that helps increase flexibility and strength in the shoulders and back and can be done anywhere with no equipment.

1. Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, arms by your side.
2. Extend arms straight out to the side at shoulder height.
3. Start making small circles with the hands, keeping the arms straight.
4. Gradually make the circles bigger and bigger, creating the movement from the shoulders.
5. Repeat 20 times, then repeat in other direction.

Arm Circles



Mirror Exercises (see next slide for an example of this exercise)

Autism is typically marked by difficulty interacting with others or the environment. Mirror exercises encourage the child to mimic what another person is doing, which can increase coordination, body awareness, and social skills.

1. Stand to face a partner, hands by your side.
2. Have your partner start making slow movements with their arms. Try starting with circles and progressing to more complex patterns.
3. When ready, mimic your partner's movement as if you were looking at yourself in a mirror. For example, if they raise their right arm, you raise your left arm.
4. Try lightly touching hands for added feedback
5. Continue this activity for 1-2 minutes. Try incorporating other body parts such as the head, trunk, and legs. Repeat 3-5 times.

Mirror Exercise



Pro tips

- Always consult a doctor before starting an exercise program with a child with autism.
- Start slow and monitor for signs of fatigue such as shortness of breath, muscle cramps, or dizziness.
- Ensure the child is well hydrated and rested before exercising.
- It's best to start at a low intensity and slowly work your way up to harder, more vigorous sessions.

Bottom line

Exercise has many benefits for children with autism. A study from [Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology](#) states that 79 percent of children with autism have movement impairments, which can be worsened by an inactive lifestyle. Physical activity may not only decrease negative behaviors but can increase mood, improve coping skills, and enhance overall quality of life.