

What's Wrong with W-Sitting?

The W-positions in one of many sitting positions that most children move into and out of while playing.

W-sitting is not recommended for anyone. Many typically developing children do move through this position during play, but excessive use of this position during the growing years can lead to future orthopedic and other problems.

Why do children W-sit? Every child needs to play and children who are challenged motorically like to play as much as anybody. They don't want to worry about keeping their balance when they're concentrating on a toy. Children who are frequent W-sitters often rely on this position for added trunk and hip stability to allow easier toy manipulation and play.

When in the W-position, a child is planted in place or "fixed" through the trunk. This allows for play with toys in front, but does not permit trunk rotation and lateral weight shifts (twisting and turning to reach toys on either side). Trunk rotation and weight shifts over one side allow a child to maintain balance while running outside or playing on the playground and are necessary for crossing the midline while writing and doing table top activities.

It's easy to see why this position appeals to so many children, but continued reliance on W-sitting can prevent a child from developing more mature movement patterns necessary for higher-level skills.

W-sitting can predispose a child to hip dislocation. It can also encourage tightness or stretching of muscles that should not be, and therefore interfere with movement and future orthopedic problems.

W-sitting can also discourage a child from developing a hand preference. Because no trunk rotation can take place when W-sitting, a child is less inclined to reach across the body and instead picks up objects on the right with the right hand, and those placed to the left with the left hand.

How to prevent W-sitting. The most effective (and easiest) way to prevent a problem with W-sitting is to prevent it from becoming a habit in the first place. Anticipate and catch it before the child even learns to W-sit. Children should be placed and taught to assume alternative sitting position, or say, "Fix your legs." It's very important to be as consistent as possible.

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