

What is heavy work?

- Heavy work means moving your body against resistance, which activates the proprioceptive system.

Why is activating the proprioceptive system important?

- To help us understand where our body is in space (e.g. when tying shoes without looking)
- To tell us how much force we are using and whether we need to use more or less force in order to successfully complete a task (e.g. when colouring, cutting our food or opening/closing a door)

How does heavy work help children?

- Heavy work (working against resistance) generally has a calming or organizing effect.
- It allows children to adjust their arousal level to help them focus and improve performance of daily activities.
- Heavy work helps to improve body awareness, which helps with overall coordination.

How to use heavy work activities at home?

- Pick a few of the following and see what works best:

1) Pushing/Pulling Activities:

- Pushing a heavy grocery cart, stroller or wheelbarrow (over grass or carpet adds resistance), real or pretend lawnmower or vacuum, etc.
- Pulling a weighted suitcase, wagon, sled, or a sibling/pet along the floor on a blanket
- Using a hands-and-knee position or lying on tummy while reading/doing homework
- Practicing animal walks/crawls (crab walk and bear walk) or wheelbarrow walking
- Playful wrestling or rough housing for fun



2) Squeezing:

- Playing with resistive putty or playdough while using tools such as scissors, rolling pins, cookie cutters and stampers
- Cutting out items from thick cardstock paper
- Kneading cookie, pizza or bread dough with hands



3) Lifting/Carrying:

- Carrying bins full of groceries, laundry, toys, books or a heavy backpack
- Carrying buckets of water for cleaning or watering plants
- Digging in dirt or wet sand
- Having a pillow fight or building a fort using chairs, pillows and blankets



4) Climbing:

- Most easily done at a playground with ladders, rock wall, climbing structures, etc.
- Going up and down stairs (add weight when possible by carrying a backpack, etc.)
- Climbing a tree/rope or pulling self out of the pool (without the ladder)

5) Jumping:

- Jumping on a trampoline or playing jumping games like hopscotch or jump rope
- Sitting and bouncing on a hippity-hop ball or exercise ball

6) Chewing/Sucking/Blowing:

- Chewing gum or chewy foods/candy (bagels, beef jerky, dried fruit, granola bars, licorice, fruit roll-ups, tootsie rolls, starburst)
- Eating crunchy foods (raw fruit or veggies, pretzels, popcorn, pita chips)
- Using a straw to suck, especially thick liquids like a smoothie or shake
- Drinking from a suction water bottle
- Blowing bubbles, kazoo, harmonica, whistle, pinwheel, balloons, etc.

7) Exercise/Sports:

- Most physical activity provides “heavy work” so it is best to follow your child’s interests. Great ideas include: skating (ice or inline), swimming, gymnastics, trampoline, biking, running sports (soccer or basketball), wrestling, martial arts, rock climbing, weight training, yoga, Pilates, tennis, etc.

