

What's the big deal about W-sitting?

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Walk into any preschool class or daycare center and you will see children sitting in various positions from slumped to erect, side-sitting to practically lying down. But one position will probably be more prevalent than any other: the dreadful W-sit.

Dramatics aside, W-sitting is such a common way for children to sit, so many parents find themselves asking if it's really so bad and if they should worry about it.

What is W-sitting?

W-sitting is a position in which a child sits with their knees in front and their bottom between their feet on the floor. Many children find this a comfortable way to sit because it is easy to transition in and out of, and it uses tension in the ankle, knee, and hip ligaments (instead of muscles) to give the child stability. Over time their bodies adapt to this position by lengthening those ligaments, which creates less tension in those joints over time.

Why is this a problem?

Over time, that reduced ligament tension in the joints will create too much flexibility in the child's ankles, knees, and hips that could potentially lead to future complications in walking and movement. In addition, because a child uses their ligaments to be stable when in this position, they are using their muscles less, which won't help their muscles to become stronger.

If a child uses only W-sitting, most of his or her playing with toys happens directly in front of them, rather than reaching to the side and back, because those movements of reaching and turning create increased tension and potentially pain. With this reduced movement, the

muscles of the whole body are challenged less and become weaker.

W-sitting can be detrimental for the normal development of any child, but for a child who already has difficulties with flexibility, weakness, or a difficult time moving normally, a habit of sitting in this position could be disastrous. Paying attention to how your child is sitting and helping them move away from W-sitting is important and worth your time.

What should parents do about W-sitting?

The easy answer is to never let them start; but if your child already prefers to W-sit, it's not too late. Start by using simple words to explain why you want them to sit differently. They may not understand right away and learning a new way to sit can be a challenge for some children. By providing a simple explanation, it may help them be more tolerant and patient while they practice.

Show your child what correct sitting looks and feels like. There are many other positions children can use: ring sitting (sitting with feet together in front), criss-cross-applesauce

(legs crossed in front), side sitting (sitting with both legs to one side), or kneeling (either on their knees while sitting on their feet or up on their knees).

Acknowledge that it might not be comfortable for them (remember, if they've been sitting for a while they will need to practice strengthening those muscles!). Be persistent in reminding them every time you see them sitting in W-sitting to "fix your feet", "move your feet in front", or "sit on your feet," and wait for them to allow them to practice the new position to gain the strength, flexibility, and correct movement that we want them to have.

Act in love, take care and good luck. It will work eventually. You can do this!

