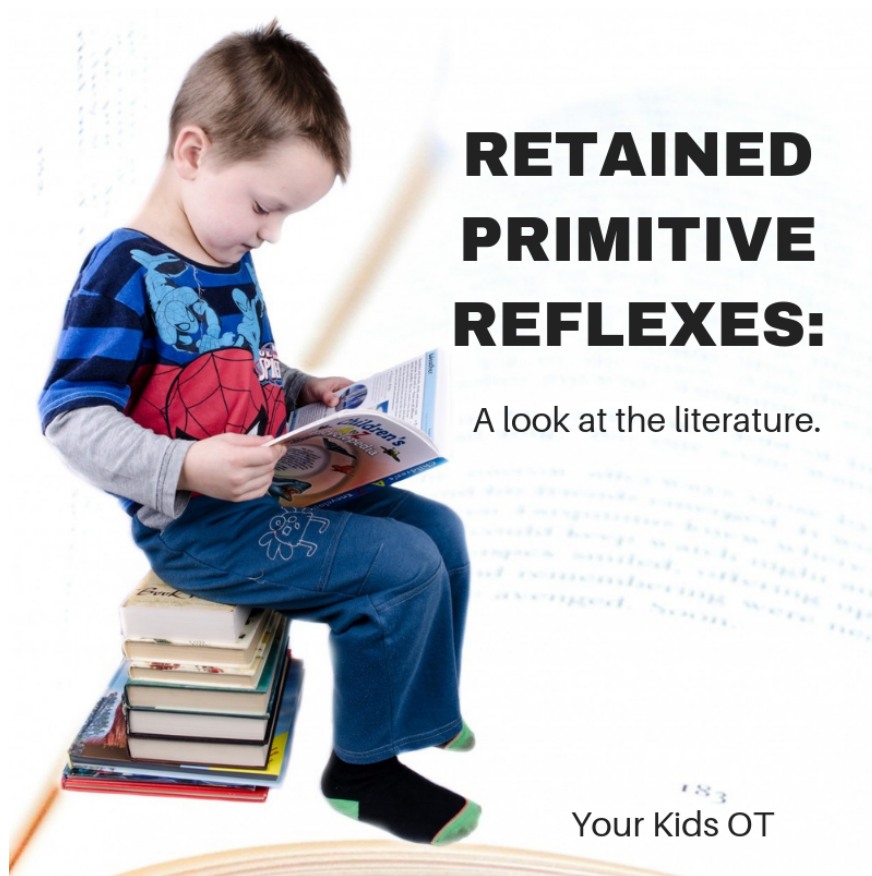




Retained Primitive Reflexes: A look at the literature.

1/10/2018



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Your baby turns their head with their mouth open when the corner of their mouth is stroked or touched. They look like they are looking for food. (*Rooting reflex*).

You touch the corner of your baby's mouth and they begin to suck to feed, suck on fingers, suck on a pacifier. (*Sucking reflex*).

Author

Hi, I'm Cindy and I am an Occupational Therapist. I enjoy working creatively with children to see them reach their potential. Read more about me [here](#).



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Your baby throws their head back, extends their limbs, cries and pulls their arms and legs back in again when they hear a loud sound or even their own cry. (*Startle reflex*).

Your baby wraps their fingers around yours when you place it into the palm of their hand. (*Palmar grasp reflex*).

These are some of the primitive reflexes that full-term babies demonstrate at or soon after birth. Primitive reflexes and their postural reactions are automatic brainstem-mediated movement patterns that start developing in utero and are usually integrated (and are harder to elicit) after 6 months of age.*

After birth, a baby experiences the sensations and stimulation of the world. They begin to develop more coordinated movement and neurological control. This helps them to integrate the primitive reflexes and postural reactions to higher level motor patterns (such as crawling, walking, talking) and higher level learning and brain development.

When primitive reflexes do not fully "integrate" they are also referred to as "retained". You can get a free copy of "[Signs of Retained Primitive Reflexes](#)" from Integrated Learning Strategies.

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 Signs of Retention Reflex Milestones 				
Primitive Reflex	Purpose of Reflex	Appears	Integrated by	Signs of Retention
Fear Paralysis Reflex	Physical paralysis to perceived danger	In the womb	The time the baby is born	Intensified to intense fear • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger
Moro Reflex	Fight or Flight reaction	Birth	2 to 4 months old	• Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger
Spinal Galant Reflex	Helps with the birthing process	Birth	3 to 9 months	• Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger
ATNR	Assists baby through birth canal	Birth	6 months	Fear based coping • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger
STNR	Prepares baby for crawling	6 to 9 months	9 to 11 months	• Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger
TLR	Head Management and posture stability	In Utero	3 1/2 years	True walking • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger • Extreme fear response to perceived danger

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There is much evidence that can be found in medical, neurological and pediatric journals on primitive reflexes and brain development. Here are a few references from the great body of evidence.

- There is a growing body of evidence connecting retained primitive reflexes with a variety of disorders including cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder, ADHD and learning difficulties. Here are a few of these references.

- Konicarova, J. & Bob, P. Act Nerv Super (2012) Retained

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Primitive Reflexes and ADHD in Children. 54: 135.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03379591>

- Konicarova, J. & Bob, P. Act Nerv Super (2013) Principle of Dissolution and Primitive Reflexes in ADHD. 55: 74. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03379598>
- Konicarova, J & Bob, P. (2013) Asymmetric tonic neck reflex and symptoms of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder in children, International Journal of Neuroscience, 123:11, 766-769, DOI: [10.3109/00207454.2013.801471](https://doi.org/10.3109/00207454.2013.801471)
- Gieysztor, E. Z., Choińska, A. M., & Paprocka-Borowicz, M. (2018). Persistence of primitive reflexes and associated motor problems in healthy preschool children. *Archives of Medical Science: AMS*, 14(1), 167-173. <http://doi.org/10.5114/aoms.2016.60503>
- Gieysztor, E., Sadowska, L., Choinska, A., & Paprocka-Borowicz, M. (2018). Trunk rotation due to persistence of primitive reflexes in early school-age children. *Adv Clin Exp Med.*,27(3), 363-366. doi:doi: 10.17219/acem/67458
- Goddard Blythe, S. (2006). *The Well Balanced Child: Movement and Early Learning*(2nd ed., Early Years). Hawthorn Press.
- Brandes, B. (2016). *SYMPHONY OF REFLEXES: Interventions for human development, autism, adhd, and other neurological*. S.I.: CREATESPACE.

Efficacy of Movement Programs for Helping Those with Retained Primitive Reflexes.

This is an emerging area of research which continues to grow. Here are a few of these references.

- McPhillips, M., BSc, Hepper, P., Phd, & Mulhern, G., Phd. (2000). Effects of replicating primary-reflex movements on specific reading difficulties in children: A randomised, double-blind, controlled trial. *The Lancet*,355(9203), 537-541. doi:[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(99\)02179-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(99)02179-0)
- Fredericks, C. R., Kokot, S. J., & Krog, S. (2006). Using a developmental movement programme to enhance academic skills in grade 1 learners. *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation*,28(1), 29-42.
- Krog, S. (2010) Movement programmes as a means to learning readiness, University of South Africa, Pretoria, <<http://hdl.handle.net/10500/3514>>
- Krog, S. (2015). Movement activities: A critical link in

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developing motor skills and learning in early childhood. *African Journal for Physical Health Education, Recreation and Dance*, 21(1.2), 426-443.

This is not an exhaustive literature review. Please let me know if you have further evidence.



Want to find out more about primitive reflexes? Are you interested in testing if your child has retained primitive reflexes? Are you a therapist or teacher looking for training on this area of practice?

Integrated Learning Strategies are offering a new e-Course to assist therapists and professionals with retained primitive reflexes. The e-Course offers a wealth of information that includes the following:

- * More than 40 videos of personal instruction, testing for the reflexes and exercises to integrate the reflexes
- * 85-page digital handbook with signs and symptoms of primitive reflexes, myths about primitive reflexes, testing and exercises
- * 7 charts and graphs that include parent observation sheets, exercise schedule, progress tracking sheets, learning and motor development checklists and much more
- * Private Facebook group where you can ask questions about testing or exercises, visit with other parents or OTs that have had similar experiences and receive additional instruction or training as needed

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I have personally completed this e-course in 2018 and highly recommend it. It takes about 3 hours to complete the whole course but you can start and stop when it suits you. It is very well presented and very comprehensive. The handbook is a wonderful resource to refer to during the course as well as to keep as a handy reference in the future. You can obtain a participation certificate by emailing the creators after you finish the course.

Have you considered how to integrate primitive reflexes? Have you joined up to do the e-course?

Cindy



Cindy is a registered Occupational Therapist practising in Sydney Australia. She has two young children who are a constant source of inspiration and learning. Cindy loves working creatively to help children to reach their potential, finding opportunities in everyday living and making learning fun. Cindy is the author of the Occupational Therapy blog [Your Kids OT](https://www.yourkidsot.com/blog). Read more articles from Your Kids OT at <https://www.yourkidsot.com/blog>

The information on this site is general in nature. The activities are safe for most children, however, you should consult an Occupational Therapist or health professional to address specific movement, sensory or other medical conditions.

* Zafeiriou, D. I., MD, PhD. (2004). Primitive Reflexes and Postural Reactions in the Neurodevelopmental Examination. doi:10.1016/j.pediatrneurol.2004.01.012



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