

Fine Motor Skills

The development of children's fine motor skills is an important foundation for the attainment of other important skills in the future such as writing, drawing and self-help. (NCAC, 08)

What are fine motor skills? The term 'fine motor' means 'small muscles'. Fine motor skills involve the use of the small muscles in the fingers, hand and arm to manipulate, control and use tools and materials. Hand-eye coordination, where a person uses their vision to control the movements and actions of their small muscles, is also an important component of fine motor skill development. (NCAC, 08)

Why are fine motor skills important?

Fine motor abilities form the basis for many of the skills that children will develop and enhance as they move through childhood. For infants and young children, their fine motor skills facilitate their interactions with their world, and therefore their learning. As they develop, children's fine motor skills are essential precursors to the development of early literacy, numeracy and self-help skills such as independent dressing and toileting. As children move through their preschool and into their school years, their fine motor skills assist them to continue to develop their literacy and numeracy skills, as well as to participate in a range of more complex activities such as art/craft experiences, board games, construction activities using blocks and commercial construction kits, using computers and playing musical instruments. (NCAC, 08)

Activities that develop and strengthen thumb and finger muscles

Encourage your child to do these activities with her preferred hand and use her thumb and index finger (and middle finger if required)

- Self Help: Finger feeding, using a spoon and fork, spreading and cutting with a knife (strengthens the index finger), drinking from a cup, and dressing skills are all meaningful daily activities that help develop fine motor skills. Teaching step by step and making some adaptations (such as a zipper ring) can make this process more successful. Include Buttons, zippers and velcro
- Tong/Tweezer activities: Collect small objects from around the house eg. buttons, dry macaroni, beads, etc. Spread them out on the floor or table and encourage your child to pick them up with a pair of tweezers and place them into a container
- Threading - Have fun making necklaces using a variety of materials to string such as: buttons, popcorn, macaroni, cut-up straw
- PEGS! Get your child to clip pegs on containers, around thick cardboard or at the end of a shirt. Squeeze pegs positioned on a clothes horse to remove dolls clothes or dress ups
- Puzzles
- PLAYDOUGH!! Hide tiny objects or toys in playdough and get child to find them. Provide clay or playdough for the child to knead and manipulate. You can pretend to make pizza or build a variety of things. Roll, squeeze, push and poke playdough, clay or therapyputti. Make a birds nest by pinching the playdough between the thumb and fingers, then make eggs for the nest by rolling the playdough into balls; Encourage your child to hold small playdough balls between her thumb and index finger and squash the playdough until her fingers meet. (Pretend the play-dough is a bug or egg.) Repeat with the thumb and middle finger, and then with the thumb, index and middle fingers all together.
- COLLAGE!! Using glue, meat trays or paper and various collage materials, allow child to make a collage or their very own design. If you don't have glue, you can use syrup or honey and popsicle stick for spreading
- Tearing and Ripping: Tear and crumble newspaper; Make a game throwing the crumbled balls of newspaper into recycling bin
- Using a hole punch, to make a variety of patterns and pictures
- Squeeze out a sponge: Set up two separate bowls, one filled with water and the other empty. Give your child a sponge and have them soak it in one bowl. Then have them squeeze the water out of the sponge into the other bowl. They can transfer water back and forth between bowls, too. This simple game can strengthen hands and forearms. It's especially fun if you throw in some bubbles or some food dye

- Pushing games: corn cob holders, toothpicks or large push pins (thumb tacks): Place a picture over a sheet of craft foam or cork board (or trivet). Then use the push pin or corn cob prongs to punch holes along the lines of a picture. Hold it up to let the light shine through.
- COINS: getting coins out of a wallet/purse one at a time or placing them in a slot, e.g. piggy bank
- Using eye droppers, you can make pictures and explore colour mixing with this activity as well
- Zip lock bags
- Water play with spray bottles, water guns, squirt toys. Spray bottles: help water plants or spray the windows to clean, play with it in the bathtub, play outdoors in warm weather, add food colouring to make spray bottle pictures. Water guns: outdoor summer fun as well as in the bathtub. Small squirt toys, often look like fish or animals, encourage pinching with 1 or 2 fingers opposite the thumb
- BUBBLE WRAP!! Encourage popping the bubble wrap using the index finger and thumb, if this is unachievable squeezing the bubble wrap will also support development.
- Interlocking construction toys such as lego.
- Use stickers or sticky tape to stick things down.
- Play board games such as trouble, snakes and ladders or pick up sticks.
- Cutting: Sometimes small child-sized self-opening scissors can help. Begin with single snips on stiff paper and gradually progress to cutting lines etc. Once children are able to snip and cut paper, use thicker pieces or paper or cardboard to support strength development. (Bruni, 2004)
- Multi-sensory visual motor activities: If printing practice with paper and pencil gets boring, using a variety of materials may be more fun: Finger painting, sponge tracing/drawing, drawing in sand with a stick, stickers, stencil tracing, magna doodle.
- Sensory play: Sensory materials, such as sand, water, playdoh, finger-paint, helps develop important sensory discrimination in the hands.

Fun drawing and writing specific activities

- Provide a range of pencils, textas, crayons and chalks. Use different coloured and sized paper and cardboard.
- Vary where your child does his activities for example, work at a table, easel, blackboard, whiteboard or draw on concrete with chalks.
- Make birthday cards or special occasion cards.
- Copy and draw shapes and letters.
- Draw or write on a Magnadoodle or Megasketcher.
- Draw around hands and feet.
- Stencils or tracing.
- Duo drawing – draw some dots or squiggles and your child joins them to make a picture, or draw the out-line of a person and he draws the eyes and mouth.
- Play O and X's.
- Write a shopping list. (instead of writing words you and your child can draw what is needed)

References:

- Extract from Putting Children First, the magazine of the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) Issue 28 December 2008 (Pages 3-5)
- Maryanne Bruni, OT Reg(Ont) – Nov. 1998; Revised: Oct 2004