

What do we mean by “fine motor skills”?

(This is a compilation collected from various resources)

Pincer Grasp

A pincer grasp is seen when the thumb and first two fingers meet. As grasp matures, we develop an “open web space” (see picture to the left). Do you see how thumb and forefinger make a circle? This enables kids to easily straighten and bend fingers. A “closed web space” inhibits finger movement.

Pincer grasp can be improved through any activities that encourage a child to hold small objects between her thumb and fingers. Suggestions include:

- tearing paper
- playing with Unifix cubes, Lego, K'Nex
- stringing Cheerios
- writing with short crayon pieces to promote an “open web space”.

Hand Strength

Did you know that the “pinky” side of the hand and the “thumb” side of the hand play different roles? The “pinky” or “ulnar” side provides strength. (Can you feel that large muscle on the outside of the hand?) The “thumb” side or “radial” side specializes in dexterity. Developing hand strength in the “pinky” side is crucial for many academic and daily life tasks.

Hand strength in children can improve through daily participation in a variety of fine motor activities such as:

- opening and closing containers and Ziploc bags
- pulling on and off socks and shoes
- learning to cut with scissors
- squeezing sponges or wringing washcloths during water play

Bilateral Coordination

Using two hands together is key for success in a child's many daily tasks such as learning to tie shoes, buttoning and zipping, and opening and closing food containers. It is also class activities as children grow older as when placing worksheets in a folder, holding a piece of paper with one hand while writing, or using a pencil and ruler to draw lines.

As kids get older, difficulty with bimanual skills can translate into difficulty with tasks at both home and school. Participating in daily two-handed activities can help children improve bilateral coordination.

Using two hands together is important for many daily tasks throughout childhood such as learning to tie shoes, buttoning and zipping, and managing containers during lunchtime at school. It is an important skill during classroom activities as when placing worksheets in a folder, holding a piece of paper with one hand while writing, and using a pencil and ruler to draw a line.

As kids get older, difficulty with bimanual skills can translate into difficulty with school. Encouraging children to engage in two-handed tasks daily helps to improve this area of fine motor skill.

The following activities are helpful suggestions for developing bilateral coordination:

- Bopping a balloon back and forth or popping bubbles with both hands
- Tearing/ crumpling tissue paper, cottonballs (create a craft, etc.)
- Connecting/ separating construction toys; magnetic blocks, Mega blocks, pop-beads, Legos
- Playing catch/ throw games to encourage coordinating both hands
- Playing with toy instruments; banging drums, triangle, symbols
- Pinching, pulling, squeezing, play-doh (finding hidden objects, etc.); as well as using the play-doh “tools”
- Playing with a Zoom Ball
- Stringing uncooked pasta on yarn or beads on pipecleaners/ string
- Snipping/ cutting with scissors- yarn, string licorice, play-doh, construction paper (thicker), coupons, etc.
- Lacing activities/ games- i.e. use hole punchers with craft projects and have the child lace string/ yarn through the holes
- Mr. Potato Head
- Frosting cookies with a butter knife, spreading peanut butter on crackers/ toast

Tactile Perception

Children develop hand skills through interacting with objects in their environments. Picking up a pompom is very different from picking up a large rock. A child uses a light touch and barely any shoulder movement for the pompom. Whereas, she uses a strong grasp and plenty of shoulder strength to lift a rock.

We can provide children with a variety of daily tactile and proprioceptive experiences to help them master the force needed to hold an object and to adjust and accommodate to different sensory experiences.

Here are a few ideas to encourage development of tactile perception using fun activities:

- Encourage your child to play with a variety of different sensory mediums to encourage the hands to explore the different tactile sensations.
- Hide a few of your child's toys in a pillowcase and encourage your child to find and identify the toys by feeling for them.
- Limit screen time and encourage hands-on play. Whether indoors or outdoors, your child's touch perception will benefit from grasping, moving and playing with real life objects instead of playing on a flat, smooth screen.

Shoulder Stability/Reaching

In order to have good fine motor control, the shoulder must be stable and a child must have adequate upper body strength. Think about it: If a child has trouble sitting up straight or if he cannot hold his shoulder and arm still, then he cannot cut carefully on a line or accurately place pegs in a pegboard.

Activities to build shoulder strength are key to developing fine motor skill. Here are some playful, fun activities to work on shoulder strengthening for kids:

- Monkey Bars
 - Climbing trees or playground equipment ie ladders, ropes and rock walls
 - Wheelbarrow walking with a friend or over an exercise ball
 - [Animals walks](#) where the child has to weight bear through the arms and hands such as bear walk, seal walk or donkey kicks
 - [Balloon volley](#) keeping the balloon overhead
 - [Yoga poses](#)
 - Jumping rope – holding the shoulders steady while you move the rope provides excellent isometric contraction (stability) of the shoulder muscles
 - Washing windows, table tops and desks
 - Playing catch with a large exercise ball or a weighted ball
- [Drawing, writing or coloring on a vertical surface](#)