

Occupational Therapy Advice



Upper limb and fine motor activities

Shoulder and Elbow Stabilisation

Muscle control develops from the shoulder down to the hand. Good hand function is dependent on well-developed shoulder, upper arm and forearm musculature. To enhance control, these exercises should be performed daily.

Animal walks



Get your child to walk like an animal. These activities (heavy work activities) make the joints and muscles of the arms and legs work hard, and help strengthen them. It also works the abdominal muscles which are important for sitting at the table for handwriting.

Different animal walks include:

- Crab walks: Seated on the floor with the arms behind the back, lift the trunk and walk sideways using the arms and legs.
- Frog jumps: crouch on the floor with your hands resting in between your legs then hop like a frog.
- Elephant walks: Walking forward and backwards on hands and feet with legs out straight.
- Leopard crawl: Lie on your tummy and use your elbows to crawl along the ground.
- Donkey kicks: Plant both hands firmly on the floor and kick up both feet like a donkey bucking.
- Wheelbarrows: Have your child walk on their hands with their arms extended while you hold their feet, ankles or knees.

Heavy work activities

Fit ball walks: Have your child use both hands to push a fit ball up, down and across the wall.

Other heavy work activities include:

- Scooter board: Lie on your tummy on a scooter or skate board and push yourself around the room.
- Hand pushes: Put your hands against your child's and get them to push against your hands as hard as they can. This can be turned into a fun game by singing



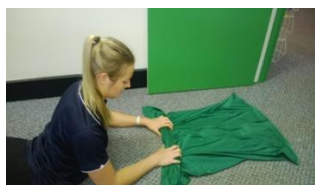
“Row, row, row your boat”.

- Wall pushes: Push evenly with both hands against the wall. See if you can make the room bigger!
- Play twister: Use your hands and arms to support you in a fun game of twister.
- Ball Push: Lie on your tummy and support yourself on your elbows. Push a tennis ball with your hands along the floor, bounce it off a wall and catch it if you can! (Hint: A bigger ball is easier).
- Throwing balls (big ones, little ones, weighted balls)
- Encourage outdoor play including climbing, hanging, and swinging.
- Ribbon arm circles at side: Have your child hold ribbons in their hands with their arms straight out at sides at shoulder level. Make 5 small circles then 5 medium circles and finally 10 large circles. Keep them round. Try to do them slowly and smoothly – do not whip them fast. Rest a short while then repeat in the opposite direction. Gradually increase from 5 to 10 to 20 circles. Repeat this process with arms straight out in front at shoulder level.
- Swimming on dry land: With arms only, do the freestyle stroke 10 times. Then backstroke 10 times. Rest in between strokes. Gradually increase to 20.
- Get your child to help carry in the groceries! This activity is easy to make harder by adding more weight to the shopping bag and helpful as well!

Wrist Stabilisation Activities

Wrist stabilisation is important for supporting movements of the hand and fingers. Improving movements of the hand and fingers reduces fatigue felt in the wrist, arm and shoulder during handwriting.

Floor, desk, and wall activities



Towel Scrunches: Have your child sit at a table with their elbows tucked into their sides, and forearms flat on the bench top. Alternatively, lie on the floor on your belly propped up on your elbows and forearms. Make sure your child keeps their wrists firmly on the bench top or floor. Have a thin towel lying out in front of them. The thicker the material the harder it is for little hands, so start thin! Have your child reach forward with their fingers and gather the material up in their fingers, then repeat until they have scrunched up all of the towel with their fingers.

Other Wrist Stabilisation Activities Include:

Drawing or painting on vertical surfaces e.g. white board, black board, or painting easel.

Floor activities- Play different board games on the floor. Have your child lay on their tummy, with their palms facing flat on the floor. When it is time for your child to have a turn of the game have them push up with one arm and place pressure through the arm whilst playing the board game.

Finger Strengthening Activities

Finger strength is the strength of the small muscles within your fingers. Finger strength is important for gripping and moving your pencil for handwriting. Finger strength is also needed for everyday activities such as dressing.

Cooking



Have your child knead and roll dough, make sure your child has their arms and elbows by their side and are using their hands and fingers to knead and roll the dough. All of these activities can also be completed with play dough.

Other cooking activities include:

- Stirring mixtures with spoons.
- Squeezing out icing from piping bag, or squeezing sauce bottles.
- Using their thumb and index finger to grasp chocolate buttons or lollies to decorate cakes, cookies or cupcakes.
- Using both hand to roll cookie dough into balls

Games



Play tong games with your child such as Operation and Giggle Wiggle, grasping tongs with thumb and index finger to pick up different coloured pom poms or marbles and sort them into different containers.

Other games include:

- Use chopsticks to pick up food or sort different items such as pom poms. Make sure your child is using their index finger and thumb to strengthen their pincer grasp.
- Use play doh or theraputty, have your child roll, pinch, cut, pull apart and squeeze play doh or theraputty.
- Hungry hippos or Rabbit Racers, use index finger to push down on button.
- Play board games that encourage the use of pincer grasp such as Jenga or Trouble. Make sure your child is using their thumb and index finger to grasp pieces.

Art and craft



Have your child use a pincer grasp to pick up glitter, sequins or pom poms to decorate pictures, crowns or butterflies.

Other art and craft activities include:

- Drawing with rock crayons (small crayons) or small pieces of chalk to encourage the use of a pincer grasp.
- Use water guns, spray bottles or droppers to paint pictures.
- Simple construction activities with cardboard paper, sticky tape and glue. (See Women's Weekly Art and Craft books for ideas)
- Squeezing clothes pegs around a plastic container to make cages for zoo animals. You can also draw faces on pegs and pretend they are talking to one another.

iPad apps



If you have an iPad or iPhone there are some great apps targeted at improving fine motor skills. Dexteria and Dexteria Jr requires children to pinch crabs or peppers using their index finger and thumb, tracing and erasing letters with their index finger and tapping different coloured buttons on screen with different fingers.

Other iPad apps include:

- Dexteria or Dexteria Jr
- My First Yoga

Finger Coordination Activities

Finger coordination is the ability to move the small muscles in your fingers together to perform desired actions. Finger coordination is needed to position and readjust your pencil and move your pencil for handwriting.

Pencil aerobics



Have your child spin their pencil around using their thumb, index and middle finger. This skill is important for being able to reposition the pencil in the right direction when picking it up.

Other pencil aerobics include:

- Harry Helicopter: This exercise involves the same movements as above but facing the palm downwards.
- Inchy Inch Worm: The child holds the pencil in a tripod grip (index finger on top of pencil, thumb on the side and middle finger underneath). Start at one end of the pencil and inch fingers to the other end.
- Woody Woodpecker: The child holds the pencil in a tripod grip and moves fingers inwards and outwards.
- Colour-in, Rub-out: Start with holding the pencil in a tripod grip and complete 'woody woodpecker' movements then flip pencil over and 'inchy inch worm' to the rubber end of the pencil, again complete 'woody woodpecker' movements to pretend rubbing out, flip pencil and 'inchy inch worm' to the tip of the pencil.
- Creepy Crawly Spider: Start by holding the pencil between thumb and index finger and swap to have the middle finger holding the pencil instead of the index finger. Walk each finger along the pencil and hold thumb in the same position.
- Steam Roller: Hold the pencil between thumb and index finger and roll the pencil between the fingers. Swap to have the middle finger holding the pencil instead of the index finger and roll the pencil between the fingers. Repeat with all fingers.

In hand manipulation

In-hand manipulation is the ability to hold and move objects within the hand, this is important for positioning and readjusting your pencil during handwriting. Art and craft activities are a good way to improve in-hand manipulation. Cutting and pasting cardboard to make different items e.g. car, boat and house. Encourage your child to use their helping hand whilst cutting.



Squirrelling and de-squirrelling

Have your child pick up 1 game piece at a time and move into the palm of their hand (squirrelling). Then as you are playing the game have them move a piece one at a time into their pincer grasp and place it in the board (de-squirrelling). The goal is for your child to be able to move the pieces held in the palm of their hand to their pincer grip, using one hand only (**have a go yourself**).

Games you can practice in:

- Connect 4
- Mancala
- Marbles
- Beading/ threading (with beads or straws)
- Don't spill the beans
- Lego

Other art and craft activities include:

- Stringing beads: Make a necklace or bracelet while holding several beads in hand at a time.
- Dress ups: Practice doing and undoing buttons, zips and clasps.
- Play with puzzles: Encourage your child to move the puzzle piece around in their hand to place in the correct position. (Increase the difficulty by using smaller pieces).
- Build towers with blocks: Increase the difficulty by using smaller blocks.

Finger isolation



Finger isolation is the ability to move one finger at a time. This is important for grasping your pencil. You can practice finger isolation by playing with finger puppets. Use different puppets for each finger and have your child move different fingers one at a time.

Other activities include:

- Sing songs using finger actions e.g. five little ducks, twinkle twinkle little star and incey wincey spider.
- Make shadow finger puppets using a torch and your hands and fingers.
- Play finger soccer, use fingers to kick a small bouncy ball across the table and into a goal (an old tissue box).
- Finger painting, have your child use all of their fingers one at a time to paint.

Finger exercises

Finger exercises help to improve the coordination of your child's finger movements. This improves your child's ability to make movements with their pencil for handwriting.

Have your child touch their thumb with their index and middle finger. Squeezing hard. Open their hand right out.



Now try again.

Other exercises you can practice include:

- Playing the piano, drum your fingers lightly on the table. Try to keep the rest of your arm still.
- Bend each finger in to touch your palm
- Touch each finger to your thumb in turn.
- Put your hands flat on the table. Drum your index fingers on the table. Keep the others still. Give all the fingers a turn.
- Close hands tightly. Make a fist with thumbs out. Stretch hands open and fingers apart. Do this 10 times slowly and strongly. Gradually work up to 20 times. This will strengthen grip by exercising muscles on both sides of the hand.
- Place elbows on desk with forearms held upright. Flop hands backwards and forwards and make snatching movements with fingers. Then make circles with the wrist – 10 clockwise and then 10 anti-clockwise.
- Shake fingers as hard as possible whenever the hand becomes tight.