

Fine Motor Skills

Fine motor skills can be described as the coordination of small muscle movements in the fingers, usually in coordination with the eyes that enable children to perform school readiness activities such as:

- Writing and drawing with a pencil or crayon
- Towering blocks
- Cutting with scissors
- Holding and using feeding utensils
- Painting with a paintbrush
- Holding and manipulating small objects
- Zippering or buttoning jackets or back packs

**Important to note that pencil grasp is just one small component to good handwriting. However, if not corrected early it may affect keeping up with class work, possibly leading to increased frustration for your child and ultimately affecting motivation.*

Outlined below are the stages of grasp development; select one to learn more:

(Scroll down to see description for each age.)

Palmar-Supinate (expected at 1 to 1½ years)



- Fisted with thumb in up position
- Wrist flexed (Wrist is bent towards body)
- Arm/shoulder moves as a unit

Expected skill:

Spontaneous Scribbling

Activities to help progress more mature (age appropriate) grasping patterns are as follows:

Develop small muscles of the hand . . .

Use play-doh, clay, molding foam or silly putty. These are great activities to develop small muscles of the hand

- Try squeezing, pinching, rolling, pulling and molding
- Use a rolling pin and flatten dough with both hands then use cookie cutters to make shapes

Use "little" water spray bottles and squirt toys or sponges

- Have your child help to water plants or help clean the table. Most children enjoy being "the little helper" and this is a great activity to help develop fine motor skills. For the winter add food coloring to have your child create pictures in the snow.
- Use sponges to help develop muscles by wringing out the water. Have your child help to clean dolls or toys in the bathtub or sink.

Play clothes pin games

- Have your child place clothes pins along the top of a container or around a plate imitating the look of hair.
- Have your child hang pictures or plush toys just like on a clothes line
- Attach several clothes pins on your child's shirt then ask them to remove them by pinching them
- Have your child pick up cotton balls or "pom poms" with clothes pins placing them in a cup stabilizing with opposite hand. Play matching games.
- When pinching the clothes pins, encourage pinching them with pad of index finger and pad of thumb and not side of index finger such as when holding a key.

Use bubble wrap

- Have your child pop the bubbles encouraging use of the thumb and pads of each finger
- For a fun gross motor activity using large muscles of body have your child jump on the bubble wrap.

Use tongs, tweezers or connected chopsticks

- Have your child pick up cotton balls, "pom pom"s, beads or beans and have him/her sort and match them if able.

Use squeeze toys or art materials

- Craft materials such as glue or paint are great to help build muscles in the hand
- Use a tennis ball and cut a slit to make a "mouth" and draw a nose and eyes above. Then have your child "feed" the ball or "Mr. Wilson" by squeezing the sides with one hand and
- placing "food" in with his/her opposite hand (the wider the slit the easier to open).



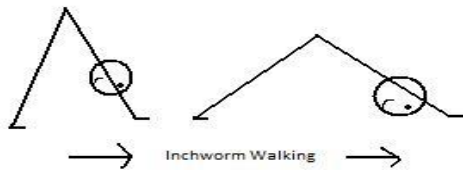
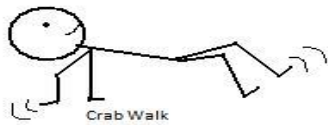
- Have your child use bulb syringes, turkey basters, pipettes or eye droppers to squirt water in the bathtub or sink.

**Important to note that underdeveloped muscles in the hand and forearm can create overcompensation of other muscles leading to weakness and incoordination which may result in awkward grasping patterns.*

Develop shoulder strength and wrist stability . . .

Have your child perform yoga and “Animal or Bug Walks”

Crab walking... Bear walking... Downward dog pose... Inchworm walking ... Wheel barrel walking ...



Encourage tummy time position if tolerated

- Have your child read, complete puzzles, color or play with toys (i.e., blocks) in tummy down position.
- Crawl on all fours (forward or backwards)

Other activities that promote and require shoulder strength and wrist stability

- Pour water from a small pitcher into a cup
- Pour sand into buckets
- Climbing activities in the playground

**These activities also focus on developing arches/separation of both sides of hand*

Develop arches and separation of two sides of the hand . . .



Hand arches are seen by the small creases in the hand. Developed over the first few years of life during tasks such as crawling or tummy time, the child holds themselves up typically with their pinky/ring finger side of the hand strengthening that side of the hand. This is the beginning for the development for separation of two sides of the hand. As the pinky side develops strength the thumb/index finger starts to develop precision. With activities described below try to keep your child's pinky and ring finger tucked in to the palm while the thumb/index side moves.

- Use scissors for cutting. Start with cutting play-doh with play-doh scissors.
- Use tongs, tweezers or connected chopsticks to pick up small objects or play tong games like “Operation” and “Bed Bugs”
- Use food coloring and water with pipettes or eye droppers to make designs on paper.
- Encourage your child to pick up multiple coins with one hand and placing them in a bank with a narrow slot.
- Use geoboards to make shapes and letters with rubber bands.
- Play games like “Connect Four”, “Pickup Sticks”, “Jenga” and “Don’t Spill the Beans”.
- Any type of pegboard games such as “Lite Brite”.
- Use zip lock bags to zip and seal.
- Encourage buttoning and zippering.
- Peel stamp and stickers.
- String beads.

Digital-Pronate (Expected at 2½ to 3½ years)



- Wrist pronated (thumb down)
- Tool held with fingers

Web space not being utilized

Expected skill:

- Imitates vertical and horizontal lines
- Snips paper in 1 place
- Cuts paper in half

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- Try squeezing, pinching, rolling, pulling and molding
- Use a rolling pin and flatten dough with both hands then use cookie cutters to make shapes
- Hide small toys in putty (pennies, beads and beans) and have your child take them out (*Caution!* not advised for younger children)

Use “mini” water spray bottles and squirt toys or sponges

- Have your child help to water plants or help clean the table. Most children enjoy being “the little helper” and this is a great activity to help develop fine motor skills. For the winter add food coloring to have your child create pictures in the snow.
- Use sponges to help develop muscles by wringing out the water. Have your child help to clean dolls or toys in the bathtub or sink.

Play clothespin games

- Have your child place clothespins along the top of a container or around a plate with a face drawn on imitating the look of hair.
- Have your child hang pictures or plush toys just like on a clothes line
- Attach several clothespins on your child’s shirt then ask them to remove them by pinching them
- Have your child pick up cotton balls or pompoms with clothespins placing them in a cup and stabilizing with the opposite hand. Play matching games.
- When pinching the clothespins, encourage pinching them with the pad of the index finger and pad of the thumb and not the side of the index finger such as when holding a key.

Use bubble wrap

- Have your child pop the bubbles encouraging use of the thumb and pads of each finger
- For a fun gross motor activity using large muscles of body have your child jump on the bubble wrap.

Use tongs, tweezers or connected chopsticks

- Have your child pick up cotton balls, pompoms, beads or beans and have him/her sort and match them if able.

Use squeeze toys or art materials

- Try craft materials such as glue or paint which are great for building muscles in the hand
- Use a tennis ball and cut a slit to make a “mouth” and draw a nose and eyes above. Then have your child “feed” the ball or “Mr. Wilson” by squeezing the sides with one hand and placing “food” in with his/her opposite hand (the wider the slit the easier to open).



- Have your child use bulb syringes, turkey basters, pipettes or eye droppers to squirt water in the bathtub or sink.

**Important to note that underdeveloped muscles in the hand and forearm can create overcompensation of other muscles leading to weakness and incoordination which may result in awkward grasping patterns.*

Develop web space . . .

Think of the "A-OKAY" sign. The web space is the area between your thumb and your index finger. Developing the small muscles that control the thumb is essential for holding and writing with tools correctly. Having an open web space promotes accuracy and efficiency with the writing tool decreasing stress on joints and reducing overall hand fatigue.

Play clothespin games

- Have your child place clothespins along the top of a container or around a plate imitating the look of hair.
- Have your child hang pictures or plush toys just like a clothes line
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Use play-doh, clay, molding foam or silly putty. These are great activities to develop small muscles of the hand

- Try squeezing, pinching, rolling, pulling and molding with the thumb and all fingers. Have your child roll dough into “hot dog” and pinch with thumb and alternating fingers.
- Hide small toys in putty (pennies, beads and beans) and have your child take them out (**Caution!** not advised for younger children)

Other games and activities

- Encourage your child to pick up multiple coins with one hand and placing them in a bank with a narrow slot.
- Use geo-boards to make shapes and letters with rubber bands.
- Play games like Connect Four, pickup sticks, Jenga and Don’t Spill the Beans.
- Any type of pegboard games such as Lite Brite.
- Use zip-lock type bags to zip and seal.
- Encourage buttoning and zippering.
- Peel stamps and stickers.
- String beads.

**Important to note that underdeveloped muscles in the hand and forearm can create overcompensation of other muscles leading to weakness and uncoordination which may result in awkward grasping patterns.*

Develop separation of two sides of the hand...



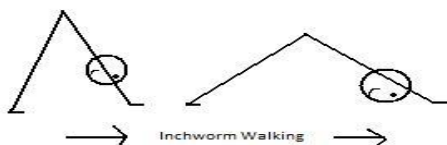
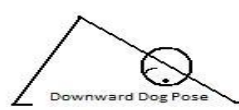
Hand arches are seen by the small creases in the hand. Developed over the first few years of life during tasks such as crawling or tummy time, the child holds themselves up typically with their pinky/ring finger side of the hand strengthening that side of the hand. This is the beginning of the development for separation of two sides of the hand. As the pinky side develops strength the thumb/index finger starts to develop precision. With activities described below try to keep your child's pinky and ring finger tucked into the palm while the thumb/index side moves.

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Develop shoulder strength and wrist stability . . .

Have your child perform yoga poses and "Animal or Bug Walks"

Crab walking...Bear walking... Downward dog pose...Inchworm walking ... Wheel barrel walking



Encourage tummy time position if tolerated

- Have your child read, complete puzzles, color or play with toys (i.e., blocks) in tummy down position.
- Crawl on all fours (forward or backwards)

Other activities that promote and require shoulder strength and wrist stability

- Pouring water from a small pitcher into a cup
- Pouring sand into buckets
- Climbing activities in the playground

**These activities also focus on developing arches/separation of both sides of hand*

Use a vertical surface to encourage appropriate wrist position .

Work on drawing or coloring on a slanted surface or place paper on the wall to draw on. This helps to develop good wrist extension and wrist stability.

Static Quadruped (Expected at 3½ to 4 years)



- Smaller web space
- Uses four fingers on tool instead of three
- Hand moves instead of fingers

Expected skill:

- Cuts on lines of a circle with 75% accuracy
- Copies a cross
- Copies a square (approximates)
- Traces a line

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- Hide small toys in putty (pennies, beads and beans) and have your child take them out (*Caution* not advised for younger children)

Use” little” water spray bottles and squirt toys or sponges

- Have your child help to water plants or help clean the table. Most children enjoy being “the little helper” and this is a great activity to help develop fine motor skills. For the winter add food coloring to have your child draw pictures in the snow.
- Use sponges to help develop muscles by wringing out the water. Have your child help to clean dolls or toys in the bathtub or sink.

Play clothes pin games

- Have your child place clothes pins along the top of a container or around a plate imitating the look of hair.
- Have your child hang pictures or plush toys just like a clothes line
- Attach several clothes pins on your child’s shirt then pull them off

- Have your child pick up cotton balls or “pom poms” with clothes pins placing them in a cup stabilizing with opposite hand.
- Encourage pinching clothes pins with pad of index finger and pad of thumb and not side of index finger such as when holding a key.

Use bubble wrap

- Have your child pop the bubbles encouraging use of the thumb and pads of each finger

Use tongs, tweezers or connected chopsticks

- Have your child pick up cotton balls, “pom poms”, beads or beans and have him/her sort them if able.

Use squeeze toys or art materials

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- Have your child use bulb syringes, turkey pastors, pipettes or eye droppers to squirt water in the bathtub or sink.

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Other games and activities

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- Use geoboards to make shapes and letters with rubber bands.
- Play games like “connect Four”, “Pickup Sticks”, “Jenga” and “Don’t Spill The Beans”.
- Any type of pegboard games such as “Lite Brite”.
- Use zip lock bags to zip and seal.
- Encourage buttoning and zippering.
- Peel stamp and stickers.
- String beads.

**Important to note that underdeveloped muscles in the hand and forearm can create overcompensation of other muscles leading to weakness and incoordination which may result in awkward grasping patterns.*

Develop precision rotation . . .

- String beads
- Have your child turn his/her pencil around like a windmill
- Use double sided crayons with different colors which promotes rotation (can find in any children’s store)

Develop separation of 2 sides of the hand . . .



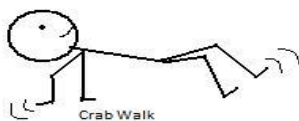
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Develop shoulder strength and wrist stability . . .

Have your child perform yoga and “Animal or Bug Walks”

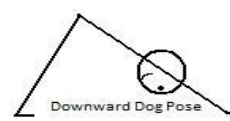
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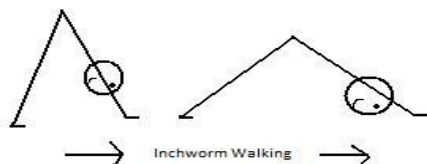
Crab Walk



Bear Walk



Downward Dog Pose



Inchworm Walking



Wheel Barrow Walking

Encourage tummy time position if tolerated

- Have your child read, complete puzzles, color or play with toys (i.e., blocks) in tummy down position.
- Crawl on all fours (forward or backwards)

Other activities that promote and require shoulder strength and wrist stability

- Pour water from a small pitcher into a cup
- Pour sand into buckets
- Climbing activities in the playground

**These activities also focus on developing arches/separation of both sides of hand*

Static Tripod (Expected at 4 to 4 ½ years)



- Child grasps tool between thumb and pad of index finger. Pencil rests on first joint of middle finger
- Reduced web space
- Hand moves instead of fingers during writing/drawing

Expected skill:

- Writing movement comes from wrist/arm
- Copies a neat square
- Cuts a square
- Copies diagonals

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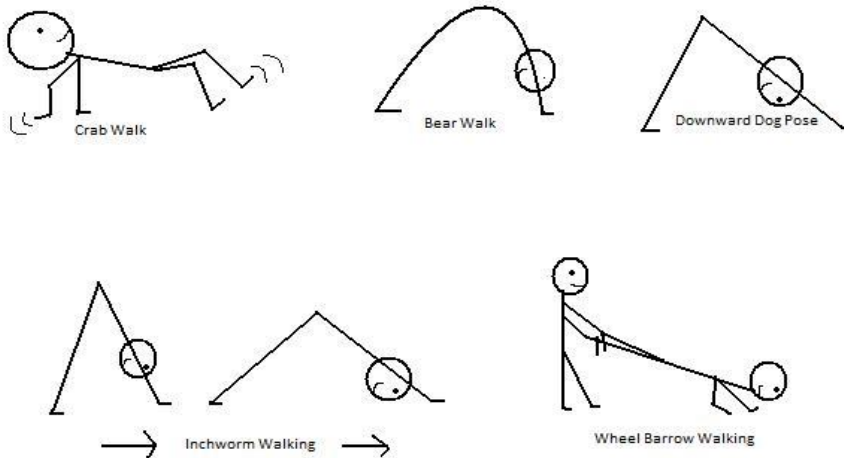
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- Climbing activities in the playground

**These activities also focus on developing arches/separation of both sides of hand*

Dynamic Tripod (Expected at 5 to 6 years)



- Wrist in neutral to extended position (wrist neither bent towards body or away from body)
- Grasp at far end of tool with thumb and pad of index finger. Tool rests on first joint of middle finger
- Open web space with thumb stable
- Fingers move during tool use

Expected skill:

- Writing movement comes from fingers
- Connects dots 6 inches apart
- Colors within lines
- Prints first name
- Cuts 8-inch line
- Cuts 3-inch square
- Cuts 5-inch circle
- Cuts triangles

If child exhibits this hand grasp there is no intervention necessary. This grasp is optimal for precision, efficiency and speed.