

Fine motor skills fact sheet and activity ideas

What are fine motor skills?

Fine motor skills are the ability to control and coordinate the small muscles in the hand for precise movements.

What are the building blocks to develop fine motor skills?

- **Arm and hand strength:** Students need muscle strength in their hands and arms, in order to effectively use them for fine motor tasks. Individuals need to train their hand and arm muscles in order to build the quality of their movement, as well as their endurance levels.
- **Grasp:** The ability to freely open and close the hand in order to grip and let go of objects when needed. - It requires coordinated finger movements and shaping of the hand to use different grasps to pick up and hold objects of different sizes and shapes.
- **Bilateral coordination:** The ability to use both hands together in a coordinated way, such as when manipulating an object.
- **Hand eye coordination:** The ability to use the eyes and the hands together to complete a task
- **Crossing the midline:** The ability to use arms, legs and eyes across the midline of the body. (MIDLINE = imaginary line drawn vertically dividing the body into two equal parts).
- **In-hand manipulation:** In hand manipulation is the process of moving objects that are already in the hand. It determines how effective and efficiently a student can coordinate the hand and fingers to complete fine motor tasks. In-hand manipulation skills include the following:
 - **Translation:** The ability to move an object from the palm of the hand to the fingertips and back to the palm.

- **Shift:** The linear movement of an object between the fingers such as moving your fingers up and down the shaft of a pencil.
- **Rotation:** The movement of an object with the finger around one or more of its axes, such as when you spin a pencil around with your fingers.
- **Hand dominance:** Hand dominance is the consistent favoring of one hand over the other for the skilled part of an activity.
- **Hand division:** Using just the thumb, index and middle finger for manipulation, leaving the fourth and little finger tucked into the palm not participating but providing stability for the other 3 fingers.
- **Body awareness (Proprioception):** Information that the brain receives from our muscles and joints to make us aware of our body position and body movement, so we can accurately control our movements.

Fine motor activity ideas

1. **Beads:** Place one bead (or cheerios, cut straws, dried pasta) at a time onto pipe cleaner/string to create jewelry/key chain. For more of a challenge, hold 3+ beads in hand and place beads on one at a time
2. **Putty:** Squeeze/mold putty into variety of shapes, pull putty apart with two hands, find coins/beads hidden in putty
3. **Snack clip/Clothespin:** Place clothespins along the top of a container, then remove and place in the container
4. **Cubes or small Legos:** Connect and pull apart pieces
5. **Bubble wrap:** Pop bubble wrap using isolated index finger or index finger and thumb to squeeze
6. **Push buttons** (on phones, sound machines, toys, etc.): Use index finger to push buttons on various objects
7. **Containers:** Open various containers to access small materials. Cut holes in the lids and fit items (like coins, cotton balls, buttons, small balls of paper, etc.) into the holes.
8. **Pipe cleaners:** Thread pipe cleaners through holes in colander
9. **Pompoms:** Transfer pompoms with thumb & index finger, tweezers, tongs, or clothespins

10. **Tissue paper:** Crinkle or rip tissue paper and glue on paper/item to create tissue paper art
11. **Toothpicks:** Pinch toothpicks and drop them in the holes of a spice container - cinnamon containers are the perfect size for toothpicks
12. **Baster/Pipette:** Dip the baster into a cup of water to obtain liquid. Then, transfer the baster to an ice tray and squeeze to release the water
13. **Citrus/Garlic press:** Squeeze playdough through the holes of a citrus or garlic press. Gather pressed playdough into a ball and repeat
14. **Spatula:** Transfer blocks to a muffin tin using a spatula
15. **Sponge:** Dip a sponge into water and squeeze it out into a cup. Repeat until the cup is full
16. **Muffin pan:** Flip a muffin pan over and stretch rubber bands over one or more cups
17. **Rice or beans:** Pour dried rice or beans into a bin to create a sensory box. Use small cups for scooping and pouring. Hide small toy items inside to find. For easy clean up, place a sheet under the bin to catch spilled materials

Functional fine motor skill practice opportunities in daily routines:

Bathroom:

- Opening/closing toothpaste, shampoo bottles, wipes, and other bath items
- Squeezing/pinching toothpaste, pumping lotion or hand soap from a bottle
- Turning water faucet on and off
- Wetting and squeezing out a washcloth
- Scooping and dumping water with cups/containers in bath
- Tearing toilet paper, crumpling up a used paper towel or wipe before throwing in the trash

Kitchen/Mealtime:

- Pulling open zip lock bags, twisting or pulling open Tupperware containers (and shutting them)
- Unpeeling plastic wrap or tin foil
- Pushing the Start button on an appliance with guidance
- Peeling bananas
- Stirring a thick mixture
- Knead dough
- Pouring an ingredient into a mixture
- “Thumb on top” positioning for utensil use
- Using tongs or scooping to serve from a platter

Dressing:

- Pulling open drawers
- Zippers and snaps
- Pulling shoelaces or drawstring
- Velcro

Other:

- Pulling open dryer door, pulling laundry out of machine (wet=more resistance)
- Pushing buttons to play music- work on isolating pointer finger
- Placing coins in vending machine
- Squeezing spray bottle for cleaning a surface
- Wrapping gifts
- Ripping up paper or crumpling it into a ball before throwing it away