

## FINE MOTOR ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP HAND STRENGTH

### Play-Dough and Putty

Play-dough and putty are often used to help improve a child's fine motor skills. Encourage your child to squeeze, stretch, pinch and roll "snakes" or "worms" with the play clay. You can even have your child try to cut the play-dough with scissors.



### Painting

Different types of painting can help strengthen your child's hand-eye coordination and manual dexterity. Finger painting gives kids an opportunity to use their hands—and to get messy. Painting with a brush helps kids learn to hold a brush and gain greater control using it as a tool. (Paint-by-number kits are great for brush painting.)

### Playing With Sponges

A new, clean sponge, some water and two bowls are all you need for another activity to build fine motor skills. Fill a bowl with water and leave the other empty. Your child can soak the sponge in the water and then squeeze out the sponge into the other bowl. It's a simple game that can strengthen hands and forearms.

### Rice Races

Divide a handful of uncooked rice into two plastic bowls and have an empty bowl handy. Give your child small plastic tweezers and grab a pair for yourself. Then, have a race to see who can be the first to transfer their rice into the empty bowl using the tweezers. If your child is struggling because the grains of rice are too small, you may want to begin with O-shaped cereal

### Water Play

Fill a cup about a quarter full of water. Give your child an empty cup and an eyedropper or a clean medicine syringe. Have your child try to transfer the water from one cup to the other by drawing the water into the dropper or syringe and then dropping or squirting it into the empty cup. You could also give your child more cups, add food colouring to the water, and make this a colour-mixing experiment.



### Gardening and Planting

Digging and gardening may seem like activities more suited to building gross motor skills, but there are parts of it that require smaller muscle control, too. For instance, transferring seedlings into a garden requires hand-eye coordination skills to safely carry the smaller plant to the new hole. Your child will also need to be able to grasp a trowel to dig and to use a pincer grasp when picking up seeds to plant.

# GROSS MOTOR ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP CORE STRENGTH

## Trampolines

Using a trampoline is a great activity to improve balance. Indoor trampoline parks are a fun place to socialise with other kids. But if you're not confident your child will follow directions or if your child isn't old enough for a trampoline park, you can also buy a mini-trampoline for supervised use at home.



## Hopscotch

Hopping and jumping require strong gross motor skills, balance and coordination. Hopscotch is a simple way to practice those skills. (As a bonus, it can help practice number skills, too!)

## Martial Arts Classes

Martial arts training is a good way to help kids develop strength in their arms and legs. Actions like kicking, punching and grappling work to develop those core muscle groups. It can help kids with balance and knowing where their body is in space.

## Playground Play

Playing on the playground can have many benefits for kids. Swinging on a swing set can help kids develop balance. It also helps them learn how to coordinate shifting their weight and moving their legs back and forth. You may also want to encourage your child to use "unstable" playground equipment like rope ladders and wobble bridges. While they can be scary before kids get used to them, they help work trunk muscles.

## Balloon and Bubble Play

Balloons and bubbles are a unique way to build gross motor skills because you can't predict where they're going to go. Kids can chase bubbles and try to pop as many as possible. While chasing them, they have to run, jump, zigzag and move in ways that require sudden shifts in balance and weight. The same goes for throwing and trying to catch or kick balloons.



## Tricycles, Scooters and Pedal Cars

Some kids who struggle with gross motor skills may learn to ride a tricycle or bike later than their peers. But there are alternatives they can use to get places and practice balance. Some tricycles come with handles so you can push while your child practices pedalling. Or you could invest in a sturdy scooter or a pedal car. They're all stepping stones to riding a bike. Once your child gets the hang of it, you can even set up an obstacle course or draw a track with chalk. (Just don't forget the helmet!)

## Dancing

Whether it's a dance class or an indoor dance party, dancing is good gross motor practice. It helps kids develop balance, coordination and motor sequencing skills. It also helps build your child's awareness of rhythm.

## Obstacle Courses

Obstacle courses get kids moving and give them a goal to accomplish. For an indoor course, use furniture, pillows and blankets to create areas to crawl on, under and through. Outdoors, you can use things like hula-hoops to jump in and out of, jumping jacks, belly crawling, bear walking and other creative movements that challenge your child to balance, crawl, jump and run.

## ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP EARLY MATHS SKILLS

It's never too early to explore numbers and counting with your child. Talking about numbers and counting early and often will show your child that numbers are part of everyday life. There are loads of fun and easy things you can try to help your child to explore numbers, giving them a great start to developing early numeracy skills and concepts.

### 1. Count everyday objects together

Bringing numbers to life can be as easy as counting everyday items with your child. Start by counting small objects together: toys, fruit, or crayons will work. Only count one type of object at a time – note that this is more effective if the object is fun or enticing to them!

As your child's confidence grows, you can start asking them simple questions, such as 'How many apples are there in the bowl?' or 'Are there more pennies than crayons on the table?' This shouldn't feel like a test, so remember to keep things light and have fun.



### 2. Sing counting songs

Many nursery rhymes are designed to help children to count. Counting songs like *Ten Green Bottles* or *Three Little Frogs* progress in reverse order, which can be especially helpful when young children start thinking about adding and taking away.

Using fingers as counters can be a useful way to make a visual link between numbers and quantity.

### 3. Build, draw, and write numbers together

Help your child to learn the numerals by engaging with their shapes. You can start by making numbers out of modelling clay: try an important date, their age, or your house number. From there, you can start drawing numbers together for fun activities. Why not bring some chalk outside and draw up a hopscotch grid?

#### 4. Point out numbers when out and about

We're surrounded by numbers wherever we go: try pointing out numbers when you see them! For example, waiting at the bus stop can be a great way to practice this: *'We need the number 3 bus... Here one comes: which number is that?'*

Learning to recognise the shapes of numbers is as important as knowing how to count out loud, and introducing these symbols early will do wonders down the road. When travelling, pointing out house numbers, bus timetables, or platform numbers will demonstrate that numbers have a real life context.

#### 5. Play board games together

As well as being a great way to spend family time, many children's board games can help with counting. Games using dice provide a great opportunity to count and add up numbers together. Snakes and ladders can have children counting from about 20 all the way up to 100, depending on the size of the board. Stimulate mathematical thinking by asking questions such as *'How many spaces do you need to advance to win?'* or even *'How many spaces did you manage to skip by landing on the ladder?'*

Playing simpler games like skittles will allow younger children to join in on the fun as the numbers are kept small.

#### 6. Read counting books

There are many stimulating picture books with stories based around numbers that you can enjoy with your child.

- *We're Not Sleepy* by Joanne Partis (Oxford) – this sweet little story is about three kittens who don't want to go to bed. There are lots of opportunities to spot and count the farmyard animals, ending with the sheep!
- *Dinosaur Dig!* By Penny Dale (Nosy Crow) – this inventive counting story manages to combine diggers, dinosaurs and counting.
- *Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes* by Mem Fox and Helen Oxenbury (Walker) – illustrated beautifully by the illustrator of *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, this story is ideal for young children.

### ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP EARLY READING AND LISTENING SKILLS

#### 1. Take it in turns to talk

Parents have long been advised to talk to our babies and young children as early and as much as possible. But research has found there is a particular benefit in turn-taking in conversations between adults and children. A recent study showed that children who were given lots of turns to talk in conversations with adults had increased spoken language skills and greater brain activity.

#### 2. Say things in different ways

It goes without saying that parents talk to their children all the time. But research with very young children shows that if we use richer language, children's vocabulary increases dramatically (e.g. instead of 'Pick that up and bring it over here', say 'Walk slowly to the kitchen, carefully pick up the fork and return it to me'). Try using alternative words for the same thing – instead of saying 'it's hot', say 'it's scorching' or 'it's blistering' or 'it's sizzling'.



### **3. Sing and rhyme**

Songs and nursery rhymes are a brilliant way to build a child's vocabulary and give them a love of language. Nursery rhymes also help children to learn about the features of stories – characters, structure, setting, and so on. If you are stuck for ideas, have a look at the BBC's library of nursery songs and rhymes.

### **4. Read together every day**

By listening to stories, children hear and learn words that we don't tend to use as much in everyday conversation. It's a great way to build their vocabulary and help them to develop a love of books. For a bit of variety, try listening to audio books in the car or take a look at some of the free eBooks on Oxford Owl.

### **5. Talk about the story**

When your child is old enough, talk about the story together. You could talk about the pictures, ask questions about what is going to happen next, or discuss how a character is feeling. This all helps them to build their language, literacy and reading skills.

### **6. Let your child be the storyteller**

Why not let your child tell the story? It is often said that if you read your child one book a day, then they will have heard over 1800 books by the time they are five. But it doesn't have to be a different book every day. We all know how much children love to hear favourite stories over and over again! Ask your child to retell a well-loved story to you for a change, in their own words. Research has shown that this not only builds their language skills, but also their confidence and enthusiasm for storytelling.