

Gross Motor Activities for Preschoolers

Gross Motor Activities for Preschool Children

Most people move every day without thinking about how to walk, bend, or move. However, some children have to make a conscious effort to plan their gross motor movements. Often children with poor gross motor skills have difficulty with even the simplest of tasks, such as sitting in a chair without falling out of it or walking without looking at their feet.

Gross motor skills include running, jumping & balance. They are necessary for proper body movement & are the foundation upon which fine motor skills develop. Gross motor difficulties can lead to trouble with handwriting, social interaction & poor self-esteem.

The following activities will help your child develop their gross motor skills.

1. **Hokey Pokey:** Sing or play music to the tune of Hokey Pokey & your child must do as the song says. For example, "put your left leg in, put your left leg out..."
2. **Follow the Yellow Brick Road:** Tape colored index cards to the floor. Have the children move around the room when the music is playing, walking on only the yellow (or any 1 color) cards. When the music stops, every child has the job of checking to make sure that all other children are on the correct color card. Make sure that there are enough cards for every child, since there are no losers in this game.

3. **Stair Climbing:** Children often have difficulty ascending and descending stairs using a reciprocal gait. To assist children with alternating feet when walking on stairs, cut out footprints and tape one to every stair (a left foot on the first stair, a right foot on the second stair, and so on). Ask your child to step on the footprints.
4. **Table Setting:** This activity can be performed to teach children how to set the table and promote gross motor skills. Make "rules" for setting the table. For example, children must get a plate from the cupboard, bring the plate to the table while tall kneeling, hop on one foot to the cupboard, and so on.
5. **Simon Says:** Have children imitate large movements, such as rotating their arms at the shoulders, and move on to more intricate movements, such as facial expressions.
6. **The Crane Game:** Place mats on the floor. Tell children to lie on their back, and place a ball to their head, using only their feet.
7. **Balance Beam Walking:** Children can improve gross motor skills through balance beam walking, since a great deal of gross motor coordination is needed to perform this activity. Start children out with an extra-wide balance beam that is low to the ground, and increase the height and decrease the width when children can perform at the current level with no difficulties.

Children can also improve body awareness skills through balance beam walking since they must know how to move individual body parts in order to maintain their balance.

8. **Scooter Board Activities:** Scooter board activities require a good deal of gross motor coordination in order for children to propel the scooter board with their feet and hands.
9. **Locomotor Activities:** Have children perform a variety of walking activities, including the following:
 - Walking sideways, crossing feet
 - Walking sideways, sliding feet
 - Walking a heel to toe line, forward and backward
 - Walk on tiptoes
 - Walk on heels
10. **Hopping and Jumping Activities:** Have children perform a variety of hopping and jumping activities, including the following:
 - Hop on one foot
 - Hop on both feet
 - Hop backward
 - Hop sideways
 - Hop over obstacles
 - Hop, skip and jump
 - Jump up and land with feet apart or together
11. **Bean Bag Heads:** Have children place bean bags on their heads and move around the room. The object is to keep the bean bag on their heads as long as possible.

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GROSS MOTOR SKILLS

Fine Motor Development 0 to 6 Years

the crayon in a closed fist with their thumb pointing up (see Figure 1). Usually by 2 years of age your child's colouring should progress from circular scribble to either horizontal or vertical scribble.

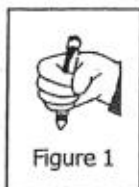


Figure 1

2 to 3 Years

During this stage of development, your child's balance & trunk stability should allow them to maintain their posture when they reach away from their body or shift their weight to one side. During hand use, less shoulder movement will be observed and more movement will occur at the elbow. Hand dominance will continue to emerge but not yet be established. During activities such as opening a jar, one hand will clearly be leading the activity (the hand turning the lid) & the other hand will be assisting (the hand holding the jar). The child will also continue to alternate lead & assist roles between right & left hands.

When drawing, your child will hold the crayon or pencil with their fingers pointing towards the paper. Such as grasp is called a pronated pencil grasp (see Figure 2). They will become capable of drawing horizontal & vertical lines, & eventually circles after watching someone else draw them first. The ability to draw a shape after watching someone else draw it first is called imitation. As the child approaches 3 years of age, they should be able to draw horizontal & vertical lines & eventually circles after being shown a picture of the form. This is called

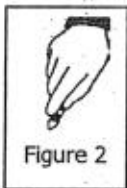


Figure 2

copying. Children will always be able to imitate a shape or form before being able to copy it.

How about scissors? At 2 years, the child will use both hands to open & close scissors. By 3 years they should be able to snip paper with the scissors in one hand & eventually cut a piece of paper into 2 pieces. Cutting along lines would not be expected at this age.

3 to 4 Years

Your child will have a strong preference for a lead/dominant hand, but switching continues. When drawing, the lead hand will be holding the crayon while the assist hand is stabilizing the paper. Your child will progress from being able to copy lines & circles to imitating crosses (+) & tracing over triangles & diamonds. The child will attempt to colour within the lines but with limited success. By 4 years of age, your child should be holding the crayon with three fingers (see Figure 3). The crayon will be pinched between their thumb & index finger & resting on their middle finger. This is called a tripod pencil grasp & is the manner in which most adults hold a pen or pencil. It is also called a mature or efficient pencil grasp.

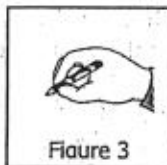


Figure 3

During cutting, your child should be able to move the scissors in a forward direction & cut along a straight line. When cutting simple curves like an S shaped line, the assist hand should begin to turn the paper to assist with cutting around a curve.

4 to 5 Years

During this stage hand use is characterized by refined wrist & finger movement & decreased elbow & shoulder movement. During drawing, a combination of finger & wrist movement should be observed. Hand dominance is typically established between 4 & 6 years, so a hand preference should be apparent & consistent. As a result, the skill of the dominant hand should begin to exceed the skill of the non-dominant hand. During colouring, the child will become capable of staying within the lines as well as copying crosses, diagonal lines & squares using a tripod pencil grasp. When cutting, the child will make smaller more precise cuts & be able to cut out a square. The scissors should be positioned perpendicular to the floor, pointing away from the child's body, and the scissors are held in a thumbs-up position.

5 to 6 Years

Both hands should work together. The roles of the right & left hands should be easily identified as dominant & non-dominant, or lead & assist. During pencil use, a tripod grasp should be established and the child should be able to copy crosses, triangles & diamonds. Small precise finger movement should be observed during colouring. When using scissors, the child should be able to hold them in a mature fashion.

Please refer to the therapeutic activities, crafts & games section of our website for fun ways & ideas to further develop your child's fine motor skills.

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Fine Motor Development 0 to 6 Years

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FINE MOTOR SKILLS

When most people think of their child's growth & development they can remember the ages at which their child first rolled, crawled, or walked. How many can recall the age at which they picked up small items between their thumb & index finger, or transferred objects from one hand to another?

Gross motor skills are large movements that an individual performs with most of their body. For an infant they include rolling, crawling, & walking. For older children & adults, gross motor skills include balance, walking, running, jumping, etc. The development of gross motor skills is easy to identify in young children and are the skills most people think of when asked about their child's development.

Fine motor skills are the manner in which we use our fingers, hands, & arms. They include reaching, grasping, manipulating objects & using different tools like crayons & scissors. But because tasks such as printing, colouring & cutting are not emphasized until a child is of preschool age, fine motor skill development is frequently overlooked when the child is an infant or toddler.

Just as gross motor skills begin to develop on the first day of life, so do fine motor skills. The following is a brief description of fine motor development from 0 months through 6 years. However, we must remember that newborns, infants, & toddlers are individuals just like us. As some of us learn new skills quicker than others, the following information should be used only as a

general guide. If your child is not able to do some of the skills at the stated age, it does not mean that they are delayed. It may help to think of an average child as being capable of tasks in a range that encompasses some of the skills above & below those indicated for their age. However, if you are concerned, consulting your family Doctor or a healthcare professional such as an Occupational Therapist, may help with determining if your concern is significant.

0 to 4 Months

Between 0 & 4 months, your baby will move their arms & hands together to bat at objects or visual stimuli. The control & use of their right & left arms will be the same. Your child will also develop the ability to move their eyes & head in a coordinated manner from side to side. This skill is required for your baby to further develop their fine motor abilities. For example, a baby of this age may turn their head from left to right in response to the sound of their Mother's voice. Between 2-3 months your child will begin to reach for objects and hold them in the middle of his/her body. Their grasp is reflexive at this age, so they will not be able to purposefully release objects they are holding.

4 to 12 Months

During this period, your baby will gain more control over their arms & progress from reaching with both hands to reaching with one hand. Voluntary movement emerges & the baby will become capable of grasping & holding objects. Around 4 months they will only be able to squeeze objects & hold them in a closed fist. By about 6 months your baby will begin to pick up small

items like raisins and by 12 months they will pinch & hold small objects between their thumb & index finger as adults do. In addition, your child will transfer objects from one hand to the other and be able to release objects from their grasp voluntarily. Your baby's visual skills continue developing during this stage. Initially they will learn to coordinate their head & eyes to move up & down

together. Soon afterwards they will watch their reach and eventually be able find an object visually, and then purposefully reach for it. During play at 12 months your child will make marks with crayons & markers, stack rings & blocks, turn pages & roll a ball.

1-2 Years

Your child's sitting balance & trunk control will improve to the point that they no longer need to use their arms for support. They will be able to sit unsupported while using their hands for play. At this age, hand & arm use is characterized by the whole arm moving together & both arms being used equally. However, as the child approaches 2 years of age, the emergence of a hand preference may be demonstrated by one hand initiating activity more often than the other. Their hand preference is beginning to emerge at this age but not yet established. As a result, the child will frequently alternate hands for leading activities.

Hand use will also change dramatically. The child will begin to move fingers independently of other fingers. This may be evident in the ability to poke bubbles or point at objects. When colouring with crayons, your child will use whole arm movements to colour & will hold

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Fine Motor Activities for Preschoolers

Fine Motor Activities for Pre-School Aged Children

The area of fine motor skills is crucial to a child's success throughout school. Fine motor skills refer to one's ability to grasp and utilize an object with their hands. This is important in almost all activities of life such as dressing, bathing, writing, & cutting. Consequently fine motor skills are of utmost importance in the classroom and throughout life.

The following activities will help your child refine their fine motor abilities.

1. Scissor Ships: Draw broad, straight lines on a sheet of paper. Tell students that the scissors are like big ships breaking through ice, and they have to be opened wide before moving on.
2. Pizza making: Give each student a piece of clay approximately the size of their palm. Have students roll the clay into a ball with both hands. Do not let students roll the clay on the table. Once the clay is in the shape of a ball, have students flatten the clay with their hand. Ask students to pinch off small pieces of clay and roll them into little balls with the thumb and first finger of one hand to represent the pepperoni or sausage for the pizza. Students must place the "toppings" on the pizza.
3. Secret Key: Place a padlock on a box filled with a goodie of some kind (fruit, stickers, etc.). Place several keys in front of the box-with only 1 key being the right key. Students must manipulate the keys in order to get a prize.
4. Rubber-band Wrap: Give students various sizes of rubber bands and several different sized jars and cans. Students must stretch the rubber bands over the cans and jars.
5. Scissor Cutting Activities: Students cut old magazines, greeting cards, and newspapers to find a specific letter or picture, and paste it into a collage.
6. Jewelry Making: Students design jewelry from macaroni, buttons, and beads.
7. Building Block Activities: Students use plain blocks, legos, or tinker toys to build and or copy designs.
8. Coloring: Students use crayons, colored pencils, or markers to color pre-drawn pictures.
9. Push Pegs: Draw circles or any shapes on a piece of styrofoam. Give students golf tees or small wooden dowels. Students must push the pegs through the circles on the styrofoam. This reinforces tip-to-tip grasp with the thumb and index finger.
10. Sand Writing: Place a layer of sand (or flour) in a baking pan. Ask students to write or draw in the sand with their fingers.
11. Chalk Scraps: Give students small pieces of colored chalk. Instruct students to hold the chalk piece between their thumb and first two fingers (the last two fingers can remain next to the second finger, but not touching the chalk). Allow students to draw on the chalkboard using this grasp. This grasp reinforces proper grasp for future pencil writing tasks.
12. Pick Up Objects: Have students pick up small objects such as pennies, marbles, or beans and place them in a bottle with a small opening or small opening in a box.
13. Q-Tip Art: Have students paint pictures with a Q-Tip.
14. Card Bowl: Cut a small rectangular shape in the lid of a bowl (Cool Whip sized). Have students put playing cards through the hole one at a time.
15. Spoons: Have students pick up beans with a spoon and transfer them from one container to another. Students should be reminded to maintain proper grasp (which is the same as their pencil grasp).
16. American Sign Language: Teach students basic letters and/or signs.

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Pencil Grasp Activities

Introduction

The manner in which a child holds a pencil is called "pencil grasp." It involves the positioning of their fingers on the pencil & the position of the pencil in their hand. Usually between the ages of 4 & 5, most child have developed a mature & efficient pencil grasp.

An efficient pencil grasp is one that allows the greatest amount of finger movement and is the least fatiguing for the muscles of the hands. These qualities are very important when learning to print & handwrite.

The most commonly seen efficient pencil grasp is called a "Tripod" pencil grasp. It is characterized by holding the pencil with the thumb, index, and middle fingers, and is used by most adults.

Many skills are required to develop an efficient pencil grasp. These include the ability to move fingers in isolation of each other, adequate hand muscle strength, & good wrist stability.

Delicate Touch (the ability to use different amounts of pressure)

- Paint with an eye-dropper
- Pick up fragile objects (Cornflakes, mini-marshmallows, small pieces of foam) with tweezers, tongs or fingers, without breaking or denting them
- Drawing or tracing on tissue paper
- Line up Dominos on their end or sides
- Release and count drops of water from an eye dropper one at a time

Precision Rotation (the ability to spin objects with your fingers)

- Activities that require rotating an object in one's finger tips
- Spinning tops and playing Jacks

- Hold a flat object such as a book or plate on extended fingers, and ask the child to rotate the object on their fingertips.
- Threading nuts on/off of bolts (progress from large to small)
- Hold two balls in one hand and attempt to rotate one ball around the other.

Separation of the Sides of the Hands (the ability to hold something in your hand while using your fingers)

- Activities that require one side of the hand for stability & the other side for movement
- Squeeze the trigger on a spray bottle with the pointer & index finger, while the thumb and other fingers stabilize the bottle.
- Roll small balls of Playdoh between the thumb and index finger
- Give the child a number of small items such as coins, beads, or bingo chips to hold in one hand. Then ask them to sort and place the items into a container one at a time using only their thumb and index finger.

The Arches of the Hands (general hand development)

- Roll objects such as a small ball or silly putty within the palm
- Roll a pair of dice within cupped hands
- Activities that require weight bearing through open hands such as wheel barrel walking and imitating animals by crawling on all four
- Line up a row of several pennies and turn them over as quickly as possible using finger movements
- Open & close zip-lock bags using fingertips, ensuring that web spaces do not collapse

- Ask the child to cup their hands with their palms up, and gradually add grains of rice (or coffee, sand, water, etc.) to the maximum amount the child can hold.

Small Muscles of the Hand (muscle strength)

- Play tug-of-war with small diameter objects such as elastic bands, coffee stir sticks, or plastic lacing.
- String beads ensuring that the child using finger movements to place the string through the bead rather placing the bead over the string.
- Insert pegs into a peg-board
- Wring out clothes or sponges
- Playing with clay, putty or Playdoh
- Games & toys that involve grasping or squeezing things

Wrist Stability (wrist strength)

- Drawing/writing on a chalk board or another surface that is above eye level
- Use a rolling pin to flatten Playdoh, cracker crumbs, cookie dough, etc. and make sure that the hands are open rather than closed around the handles
- Position games and toys on a vertical surface
- Paint, draw, colour, etc. on a vertical surface or mounted on a clipboard.

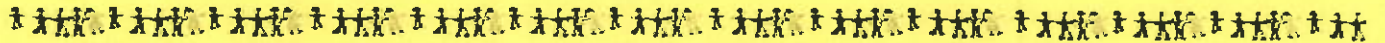
Please refer to the Articles & Information section of our website for information on developing a mature pencil grasp.

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Activities To Develop Handwriting Skills

There are significant prerequisites for printing skills that begin in infancy and continue to emerge through the preschool years. The following activities support and promote fine motor and visual motor development:

Body Stability

The joints of the body need to be stable before the hands can be free to focus on specific skilled fine motor tasks.



Wheelbarrow walking, crab walking, and wall push-ups.



Toys: Orbiter, silly putty, and monkey bars on the playground.

Fine Motor Skills

When a certain amount of body stability has developed, the hands and fingers begin to work on movements of dexterity and isolation as well as different kinds of grasps. Children will develop fine motor skills best when they work on a VERTICAL or near vertical surface as much as possible. In particular, the wrist must be in extension. (Bent back in the direction of the hand)



Attach a large piece of drawing paper to the wall. Have the child use a large marker and try the following exercises to develop visual motor skills: Make an outline of a one at a time. Have the child trace over your line from left to right, or from top to bottom. Trace each figure. Then have the child draw the figure next to your model several times.



Play connect the dots. Again make sure the child's strokes connect dots from left to right, and from top to bottom.



Trace around stencils - the non-dominant hand should hold the stencil flat and stable against the paper, while the dominant hand pushes the pencil firmly against the edge of the stencil. The stencil must be held firmly.



Attach a large piece of felt to the wall, or use a felt board. The child can use felt shapes to make pictures. Magnetic boards can be used the same way.



Have the child work on a chalkboard, using chalk instead of a marker. Do the same kinds of tracing and modeling activities as suggested above.



Paint at an easel. Some of the modeling activities as suggested above can be done at the easel.



Magna Doodle- turn it upside down so that the erasing lever is on the top. Experiment making vertical, horizontal, and parallel lines.

Ocular Motor Control

This refers to the ability of the eyes to work together to follow and hold an object in the line of vision as needed.



Use a flashlight against the ceiling. Have the child lie on his/her back or tummy and visually follow the moving light from left to right, top to bottom, and diagonally.



Find hidden pictures in books. (There are special books for this.)



Maze activities. (You can buy these in bookstores, and Spags.)

Eye-hand Coordination

This involves accuracy in placement, direction, and spatial awareness.



Throw bean bags/koosh balls into a hula hoop placed flat on the floor. Gradually increase the distance.



Play throw and catch with a ball. Start with a large ball and work toward a smaller ball. (Koosh balls are easier to catch than a tennis ball.)



Practice hitting bowling pins with a ball.



Play "Hit the Balloon" with a medium-sized balloon.

DEVELOPING MOTOR SKILLS

Promoting large-muscle skills, small-muscle skills, and skills that depend on the eyes and hands working together will give your child confidence and help him or her develop independence.

Large-Muscle Activities

Building large-muscle strength is important for children's balance, coordination, and posture, and it helps them to develop other skills such as writing. Some activities to build large muscles are:

- **Walking** forward, sideways, backward, and marching.
- **Balancing games**, such as walking on a piece of string or tape on the floor, or along a sidewalk crack or low curb outside. Also practice walking on uneven surfaces (e.g., sand, rocks, pillows/cushions on the floor).
- **Kicking, bouncing, throwing, and catching games** with objects of different sizes and weights (e.g., beanbags, beach balls, soccer balls). Make up games of throwing balls or beanbags into an empty container, or play a game of soccer or basketball without keeping score.
- **Jumping games**, such as hopscotch or jumping rope. Play "Follow the Leader" with hopping and skipping.
- **Swinging, sliding, and climbing** at a park or indoor playground.
- **Riding bikes, tricycles, scooters**, or other ride-on toys.
- **Pulling or pushing** wagons or carts.
- **Building and going on a race** using common objects (e.g., crawling under chairs and tables, jumping over a stack of books, walking on crooked lines, weaving between toys on the floor).
- **Dancing** or other free movement to music/songs (e.g., "Ring Around the Rosie").

Small-Muscle Activities

Having good finger, wrist, and hand strength, skill, and coordination helps with many daily tasks, including eating, dressing, and writing. Some activities to build small muscles are:

- **Molding clay** by squeezing, pinching, and shaping it into objects or animals.
- **Building with blocks** of all sizes, shapes, and textures. Use ring stackers and puzzles to practice putting things together.
- **Putting small objects in containers**, such as plastic bottle caps into a box with a small opening. Always supervise your child when he/she is playing with small objects.
- **Lacing or threading**, such as stringing beads, cereal pieces, or macaroni onto pipe cleaners.
- **Drawing and coloring** using crayons, colored pencils, markers, chalk, etc. Bathtub crayons are great tools to make bath time fun and educational!
- **Cutting** out shapes or pictures from old catalogs or magazines. Use holepunches or other shape punches to make designs or patterns.
- **Playing with toys** with dials to turn, lids to twist, keys to wind up, or strings to pull.
- **Putting clothes on dolls or toy animals**, especially clothes with zippers, buttons, or snaps.
- **Common tasks**, such as using a trigger sprayer to water plants, closing zipper-lock plastic bags, or squeezing out sponges filled with water.

Resources

<http://www.healthychildren.org>

HealthyChildren.org is a parenting website created by pediatricians with information from the American Academy of pediatrics' publications and child health resources.

<http://www.gameskidsplay.net/>

This listing of kids' games includes rules for playground games and verses for jump-rope rhymes.

<http://www.serve.gov/rlm.asp>

Let's Read. Let's Move. This website was created to combat childhood obesity and summer reading loss by engaging youth in physical activity and encouraging summer reading. It is led by the Corporation for National and Community Service in collaboration with First Lady Michelle Obama, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Institute of Museums and Libraries.

<http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/>

ZERO TO THREE is a national nonprofit organization that provides information and support to professionals, policymakers, and parents in order to improve the lives of infants and toddlers.

http://donnayoung.org/penmanship/k_1.htm

This website offers free printable handwriting exercises (e.g., how to print letters, numbers).

<http://www.do2learn.com/activities/artprojects/howtodraw/index.htm>

This website provides free, step-by-step, simple instructions for drawing basic figures such as dogs, people, flowers, houses, etc.