

ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE FINE MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

Help your child strengthen and refine his/her fine motor skills by giving him/her plenty of opportunities to use the small muscles. The following are simple activities that require very little time or money to create, but offer many benefits to your child's growth and development. A child's natural way of learning is to explore everything around him/her. Be sure to allow your little one to explore the environment and materials freely but safely.

- **SCARVES IN A BOX** – stuff silky scarves inside a tissue box for baby to reach for and pull out. Vary the activity by putting different textured scarves or cloth inside the box. *Variation: to add novelty to the activity, tie a small toy to the end of the scarf so baby is encouraged to pull the scarf all the way out of the box.*
- **LIDS IN A BOX** – save juice can lids; cut a slit in the top of a shoe box big enough for the lids; encourage your little one to fit the lids into the hole.
- **CLOTHESPINS IN A BOTTLE** – have baby put clothespins into a clean, plastic bottle.



- **STRING** – lay a variety of clean, safe shoelaces or string onto baby's tray. She will work the small muscles in her hand to pick the laces up. Be sure to carefully supervise this activity. *Alternate: tie laces or string onto doorknobs or chairs for baby to explore when crawling around.*
- **JARS WITH LIDS** – give your child a variety of safe containers with screw-on lids; allow him to screw and unscrew the lids; can he match the lids to the correct container?
- **FUN IN THE TUB** – give your child old meat basters, sponges, and containers to play with in the tub. As he squeezes the sponges and basters or fills and pours water from the containers, he is exercising the small muscles.

- **PLAYDOUGH** – give your little one plenty of opportunities to play with play dough. Not only is it relaxing, fun, and educational, but it strengthens the muscles in the hand. First, give him the play dough without any tools and encourage him to poke, pull, squeeze, and pound it. After awhile, provide tools, such as cookie cutters, Popsicle sticks, straws, etc. For the beginning cutter, play dough is great for cutting with scissors. For variety, make different colored play dough or add small items, such as beads, beans, or small shells, for picking out.
- **TONGS AND TWEEZERS** – Give your child small ice tongs for picking up small objects, such as walnuts, cotton balls, pom-poms, etc. Have her transfer the objects from one bowl to another. *Hint: always have her move the objects from left to right, which is the direction we use when reading.* When your child is able, introduce tweezers for picking up smaller objects, such as beans, pom-poms, string, etc.
- **BUBBLE WRAP** – Don't throw away that bubble wrap! Let your child explore it, squeeze it, pop it. Try taping it to the floor and letting your baby crawl on it, walk on it, or jump on it. *Supervise this activity to prevent baby from putting pieces of plastic in his/her mouth.*
- **BLOWING BUBBLES** – blowing bubbles is a great way to strengthen the small muscles in your child's mouth that are important for speech. *Variations: give your child a cotton ball or feather to blow along the floor or off from his/her high chair tray.*
- **FINGERPAINTING** – let your little one fingerpaint with pudding, whipped cream, paint, or shaving cream, depending on his/her age.
- **FINGER FOODS** – when baby is ready, give her plenty of opportunities to feed herself. Allow her to hold and use a spoon, even if she isn't yet successful in getting the food into her mouth. She will eventually work up to that.



- **PUZZLES** – puzzles are great for working the small muscles in the hand. Start off with simple shaped puzzles with knobs and gradually work up to more complex, interlocking puzzles.
- **SHAPE SORTERS** – Either store-bought or homemade. To make your own, simply trace a variety of objects onto a shoebox cover and cut out. Let your child work at finding the correct hole for the object.
- **LOCKS AND KEYS** – older children love to play with locks and keys. Give your child different sized padlocks and the keys to open them.
- **SCRIBBLING** – give your little one plenty of opportunities to use crayons, markers, or pencils. The younger the child the bigger the paper should be. Provide a variety of paper for scribbling on: paper bags, sandpaper, newsprint, wrapping paper, etc. Try taping large sheets of paper on a wall or refrigerator – drawing on a vertical surface requires your child to hold the crayon differently, thus using different muscles.



- **BLOCKS** – blocks are a must-have in every toy box. Whether homemade or store bought, blocks are a great open-ended toy that can be used by all ages. *To make your own, collect a variety of boxes, stuff with newspaper for more durability, and cover with colored contact paper.*