

Gross and Fine Motor Skills

How to help your children develop their gross and fine motor skills.

There are always questions when raising children, and since every child is different we want to help them develop to their fullest potential.

Some key questions in this article relate to what fine and gross motor skills are, and how we can support our children to develop them. If you are unable to find the answers you are looking for there are always community supports available to assist you.



What Are Fine Motor Skills?

Special points of interest:

- What are fine motor skills?
- What are gross motor skills?
- How do we help our children develop gross and fine motor skills?
- Fine motor and gross motor from birth to age five.

Fine motor skills are achieved when children learn to use their smaller muscles, like muscles in the hands, fingers, and wrists. Children use their fine motor skills when writing, holding small items, buttoning clothing, turning

pages, eating, cutting with scissors, and using computer keyboards. Mastery of fine motor skills requires precision and coordination.



Fine motor skills develop after **gross motor skills**, which control actions like throwing and kicking balls, as well as walking and jumping. Gross motor skills utilize larger muscle groups and require less precision.

How Do We Help Children Develop Fine Motor Skills?

Practice, practice, practice. In most cases of fine motor skill development, practice does, in fact, make perfect. Some ways to develop these skills are having children do the following activities:

- Pop bubbles on bubble wrap with just the index finger and thumb.
- Use an eyedropper to add colour to water
- Finger painting
- Puzzles
- Video games
- Trace shapes or letters
- Legos or building blocks
- Beading /Weaving
- Ripping paper
- Using tweezers

These activities focus on smaller muscle groups. Using the same muscles can help children develop **muscle memory**, which is when repetition of one action allows that action to be performed almost automatically without much effort. For example, pressing the correct buttons on video game controllers can be difficult the first few tries. But after playing the game a few times, we tend to master the buttons on the controller. Whether or not we can master the video game itself is a different story, but it does become second nature to press certain buttons to run or jump in the game.

Fine Motor Skills From Birth to Age Five

0 to 3 months

Grasping: The baby, Billy, can hold objects for a few seconds. An example is babies holding their parents' fingers. This is close to a fist grip.

3 to 6 months

Palmar grasp: This is also known as the fist grip. Billy can hold an object for up to a minute, using the palm and fingers (the whole fist).

6 to 9 months

Inferior pincer grasp: Billy can pick up a small object, like a Cheerio, by putting the forearm on the table and using the side of the thumb and the first fingers.

9 to 12 months

Isolated index finger: Billy can point to an object using only the index finger.

Self-feeding: Billy can use fingers to eat a small piece of food.

12-15 months

Superior pincer grasp: Billy can pick up and release a small object, like a Cheerio, by using the index finger and the thumb without support of the forearm. At this point, he can also turn the pages of a book, although sometimes turning many at once.

15 months to 1 ½ years

Billy can hold a spoon or a crayon using the thumb, fingers, and the palm.

1 ½ to 2 years

Billy can string large beads and imitate the drawing of circles and lines.

2-3 years

- Fold paper in half
- Draw straight lines and circles
- Imitate you drawing a cross
- Turn single pages in a book
- Snip the edges of paper with scissors (by 30 months)
- Hold crayons using the thumb and fingers
- Use one hand more often than the other for most activities
- Build a tower of up to 9 large blocks
- Put together large linking blocks, such as Megablocks
- String ½ inch sized beads
- Use a fork to eat
- Manage large buttons

4-5 years

- Snip paper with scissors
- Undo buttons and zippers
- Hold crayon or pencil correctly
- Draw lines, shapes and a few letters



Notable Accomplishments in Fine Motor Skill Development

Two popular terms that come up with learning about fine motor skills in children are fist grip and pincer grip. An example of a **fist grip** is when children use their whole hand and wrap it around a pencil to write their names. A **pincer grip** refers to the pinching muscles. Eventually, most children learn to use a pencil with their thumb and one or two fingers, which indicates that they have developed the pincer grip.

What are Gross Motor Skills?

“Children rely on gross motor skills to engage in physical play.”

Gross motor skills are movements that involve using the large muscles of the body. The development of gross motor skills starts as soon as a child is born. As children age, their gross motor abilities continue to develop and improve. Boys usually develop gross motor skills much sooner than girls, with the exception of skills

that involve balance and precise movements (i.e., skipping and hopping).

Children rely on gross motor skills to engage in physical play. For example, playing a game of tag requires running after friends and reaching out and touching someone (gross motor skills). Children also rely on gross motor skills for everyday ac-

tivities, such as walking in and out of a room.

Other examples of gross motor skills include:

- Running
- Climbing up a tree
- Throwing a baseball
- Dribbling a basketball

How

General Play- Encourage the child to engage in rough play indoors or outdoors which involves lots of running, jumping, hopping, skipping, tumbling, rolling, playing on swings, playing on monkey bars, riding a tricycle or bicycle, Simon says, red light green light, hokey pokey, balancing, etc.

Ball Play- The following activities could be done with a large ball at first, proceeding to a smaller ball such as a tennis ball or a bean bag. Throw; catch; bounce one or more times to another person; kick a stationary or moving ball; roll; toss-clap-catch; toss under leg-catch; bounce with one or two hands; bounce with alternating hands;

bounce while walking; bounce with eyes closed; catch in a container such as bleach bottle with the bottom removed; throw in a basket or at a target.

Move different ways- Wheelbarrow Walk- Have the child “walk” on his/her hands while his/her feet are held for him/her. Seal Walk- Encourage the child to “walk” on his/her hands dragging his/her trunk and legs behind him/her. Crab Walk- Have the child “walk” on his hands and feet in a sitting or lying down position. Duck Walk- Have the child walk with hands on hips and squatting low to the floor. “Other Walks”- Have the

Do We Help

child walk on tiptoes; walk on heels; walk fast, slow, backward, or sideways; walk on stilts made of large juice cans with a rope through each can and held in the hands; leap frog; three legged races; etc.

Obstacle Course- Put out a series of games for the child to complete in the sequence you establish and encourage him/her to complete the whole course (from memory). Suggestions are jumping over an obstacle, climbing up and over something, crawling under a low object, squeezing through a tunnel, sliding down something, rolling, hopping etc.

