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Fine Motor-Strength

Activities used to **strengthen** the small muscles of the hands involve materials and tools that provide **resistance**. Try these materials and activities:



[More About Hand Strength](#)

Clay, therapy putty, Silly putty, play-doh, Sculpey, bread dough, modeling foam (Crayola Model Magic)

- These are all excellent materials for squeezing, squishing, pushing, pulling and molding
- Try hiding small objects (beads, pennies, beans) inside and then try pulling them out
- Use a rolling pin to flatten it out, then use cookie cutters to make shapes
- See [Homemade Play](#) for putty



Interlocking construction toys

- Mega Blocks are large sized Legos and are best for preschool age children
- Bristle (Krinkles) blocks are a good choice for preschool age
- Legos, Tinkertoys and K'nex are best for older children
- Pop beads: large size for preschool, small (play jewelry type) for older children
- Linking chains



Water play with spray bottles, water guns, squirt toys, sponges

- Spray bottles: help water plants or spray the windows to clean, play with it in the bathtub, play outdoors in warm weather, add food coloring to make spray bottle pictures in the snow.
- Water guns and squirt toys: outdoor summer fun as well as in the bathtub.
- Sponges: squeezing to wring out the water is great for strengthening hands and forearms. Help wash the car, wash toys and dolls in the sink or bathtub, squeeze sponges on your friends during water play outdoors, bring a bucket or cooler filled with water and sponges to cool off on a hot day when on picnics, soccer games and other outings.



Clothespin games:

- Use the *pads of the thumb and index finger* to open the clothespin rather than pinching it open against the side of the index finger.
- When pinching open, try alternating each finger to squeeze opposite the thumb.
- place clothespin along the top of a container and then on top of each other to construct a design.
- Pick up small objects with the clothespin: cotton balls, pompoms, crumbled paper, beads, pegs, etc.
- Attach several clothespins along the bottom hem of shirt and then pull them off.
- Place clothespins around an index card
- Hang up pictures or plush toys on a string, like a clothesline.



Hole puncher:



- Punch holes along strips of paper (1 to 2 inches wide) or along the edges of a sheet of paper or paper plate.
- Use hole punch clippings to make confetti or 'snow' to glue on paper for pictures
- Grip style hole punchers (pictured at left) are easier for children to use, rather than the small punchers that require a strong pinch to operate.

Bubble Pack

- Pop the bubbles on large or small bubble pack by pinching with thumb and index finger or by pushing down on bubbles when sheet is placed on a hard surface.

Squeeze toys and materials



- Foam balls, animals and shapes
- Tennis ball "Hungry Guy" (see [instructions](#)): When you squeeze the ball the mouth will open. Hide pennies, pegs, beads and other small things inside. Squeeze to open and shake out the contents, then feed the "hungry guy" by slipping in the "food". The wider the slit, the easier it will be to open the mouth wide. Start with a wide slit for young children.
- Rubber "pinky" balls
- Bulb syringe (usually in infant supply sections of stores) or turkey baster to squirt water, or have a race by squeezing them to blow cotton balls and pompoms across a finish line.
- Craft activities that require using bottles to squeeze: glue, glitter glue, puffy paint, fabric paint, etc.



Pinch strengthening



- Tongs, tweezers, connected chop sticks, strawberry hullers: use these to pick up small objects for sorting, such as beads, marbles, beans, pompoms and cotton balls.
- Corn cob holders or large push pins (thumb tacks): Place a picture over a sheet of craft foam or cork board (or trivet). Then use the push pin or corn cob prongs to punch holes along the lines of a picture. Hold it up to let the light shine through.
- Push a toothpick point into a styrofoam tray or plate, or in aluminum foil placed over craft foam or corkboard to make a picture.
- Dress up dolls: requires a surprising amount of hand strength and endurance

More about hand and finger strength . . .

There are well over 25 muscles in your forearm and hand. The muscles in the forearm control elbow, wrist and finger movements. Smaller muscles within the palm of the hand control the more refined movements of the thumb and fingers.

It may appear that someone has strong hands when they are able to squeeze something really hard. But that's not the whole story. That type of strong grip comes mostly from the forearm muscles. When squeezing, some of the strength comes from the smaller muscles within the hand, but these muscles contribute only a little bit to total grip strength.



So, when we look at hand strength, we also need to look at the strength of those small muscles within the hand. In infancy, these muscles are not fully developed. Babies are able to grip and squeeze first with all of their fingers in unison before they are able to control movement in each finger individually. As infants develop, they are able to control the thumb and fingers individually, rather than as a mass grip or squeeze.

Why is this important?

When the large and small muscles of the forearm and hand are slow to develop, weakness and incoordination may result. The large muscles of the forearm may overcompensate for weak inner hand muscles. As a result, the child will find ways to hold, pinch and grip small objects in awkward ways. As examples, the child may have difficulty:

- picking up small items (bits of food, Cheerios, coins, etc.) using the pads and tips of the index finger and thumb.
- holding a pencil, crayons and markers with a 3 or 4 finger tip pinch

Recommended Vendor



[Pocket Full Of Therapy](#)

- holding and using feeding utensils effectively
- fastening closures (zippers, snaps, buttons) on garments easily
- using scissors
- imitating various finger positions during finger play (e.g., touching each finger to the thumb-opposition, making the "A-ok" sign).
- manipulating small items within the hand (e.g., transferring coins within the palm out to the fingertips).

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