

Hand and Finger Strengthening Activities

Reduced hand strength can influence ability with fine motor skills, including tasks such as using a pencil, cutting with scissors, using cutlery, opening containers, managing dressing E.g. socks, buttons, zips. This can be due to lack of appropriate opportunities to develop the muscles of the hands through play or sometimes as a result of having 'bendy' joints, which are more flexible than average.

The following activities are designed to improve hand strength, as a foundation for improving fine motor skills with everyday tasks. The activities help to build up strength in the wrists and small muscles of the hands. Ideally, the child should spend 10 - 15 minutes daily working on the activities listed. Use one or two different activities each day, to work on different muscle groups and joints. Keeping materials in containers with different types of lids E.g. Prise-off, screw-top, press-seal bags, zip wallets etc. will also give opportunities to practise useful hand-skills. Construction tasks, such as 'Popoids', Lego / Duplo, K'nex, stickle bricks also provide opportunities to build hand-strength.

Whilst participating in hand strength activities, the child should work from a position of stability i.e. seated on a chair with feet resting flat on the floor & elbows / forearms resting on the table, or standing at a table.

Playdough Activities

- Squash the dough with your fist. Use a powerful squeeze so that it oozes between the fingers. Do this with both hands.
- Roll the dough into a ball, using two hands. Roll it lightly against the table with one hand and then the other, to make it smooth. Then squash the ball flat, pressing down with one or both hands.
- Use a rolling-pin to flatten the dough and use cookie-cutters, plastic knives or scissors to cut out shapes.
- Use both hands to roll out a long snake. Thread it in between your fingers and then squeeze your fingers together to see if you can squash it. Try with both hands.
- Hide small objects e.g. buttons inside a large ball of dough. Use fingers to pull the dough apart to find the 'hidden treasure'.
- Roll out the dough to make a fat sausage shape, using two hands. Using a pincer grip i.e. thumb and index- finger squeeze the dough along its length to make it look like a stegosaurus. Use different finger combinations each time. Add legs and feature
- Hold the dough using two hands, twist it until it breaks. See how many pieces you can break it into and then roll each piece into a little ball, using one or both hands. Make a goal, using an empty

container, and practise 'taking penalties' by flicking the balls into the goal using thumb and index finger, or different finger combinations.

- Roll a large ball of dough using two hands. Press with each finger and thumb in turn to make holes in the dough. Push each finger in as far as you can.
- Form the dough into a large ball. Holding it between the index-finger and thumb, push cocktail-sticks or matchsticks into the dough to make a hedgehog or spikey creature. Pull the sticks out again at the end of the session. Try using different finger combinations.
- Make pretend food with the dough e.g. sausage, peas, chips. Use a small plastic cutlery set to cut up the food. Practise stabbing the pieces with the fork and then pushing them off into a container, using the knife.
- Using a rolling pin, roll out a ball of dough to form a flat, smooth layer. Using a blunt pencil or stick, draw in the dough to make a picture, or write your name. Alternatively, press objects into the flattened dough to create a textured collage.
- Roll out a ball of dough using two hands, to make a 'head'. Use a finger to poke, or press on, eyes, nose etc. Press a piece of dough into a plastic sieve, using thumbs or index fingers, to make textured hair to place on the top.
- Roll out a long snake with the dough, using two hands. Hold one hand up, as if giving a "high-five", squeezing fingers and thumb tightly together. Wrap the snake around the fingers and thumb, as if tying them up. Stretch the fingers and thumb apart to break the snake.