



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII ♥ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Your Growing Child's Small Muscle Development

Many of the everyday activities we engage in, such as writing, eating with a fork or chopsticks, buttoning a shirt, tying a shoe lace, or even speaking clearly, require what is called “fine motor control” — the coordinated use of our small muscles, e.g., the muscles in our fingers, hands, eyes, mouth—to do the job. These types of activities are such a routine part of what we do, we often take for granted the skills needed to do them. For a very young child, however, developing and strengthening her small muscles is a very important first step towards gaining the fine motor control that will be needed to perform many of the skills that will be expected of her in school and later in life.

To help your child develop her small muscles, provide her with many opportunities to use and play with materials that encourage her to touch, grasp, and manipulate objects of different sizes, textures, and weights. As she engages in these types of activities, she not only strengthens the small muscles in her hands and fingers, she also develops her eye-hand coordination, another important aspect of fine motor control.

This newsletter will focus on activities you can do with your child that encourages her to use and develop her small muscles, especially those in her fingers and hands. In each section we will suggest:

- ♥ Toys and activities that are appropriate for her age and abilities.
- ♥ An activity or materials that will have her use the muscles in her hands and fingers and encourage her to express herself in the process to develop her ability to form words and talk.



In This Newsletter:

To support you in fostering your child's healthy development and school readiness, this newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of how your child develops when you do these activities together,
- ♥ **Community Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

2-2-12/15

Infants

Your infant's small muscle development is more subtle and may not be as obvious as her large muscle (arms, legs, neck) development. However, your child is using and developing her small muscles from very early on, for example, as she looks around and begins to reach for and grasp objects. Initially, she may reach for things by moving her shoulders and elbows, swinging toward the object she wants to get. She may grip things by squeezing her fist with all of her fingers



together since she is not yet able to control the movement in her fingers. As she gets older, she will reach and grab for objects by moving her wrists, rotating her hands, and coordinating her thumb and forefinger movements. Over time, she will master more complex skills such as picking up and moving objects, picking up a piece of cereal and placing it into her mouth, stacking blocks on top of one another, or turning pages in a cloth or board book.

The following are some fun learning activities and materials that you can introduce to your child:

- ♥ **Stacking toys.** When she can sit up, provide some stacking toys and encourage her to place the toy parts on top of each other.
- ♥ **Feed herself.** Encourage her to pick up small pieces of food with her fingers; even squishing food with her hands is good “exercise” for her small muscles. Allow her to hold and use a child-size spoon, even if she isn’t successful in getting most of the food into her mouth.

Activity for Infants: *Sock Tug*

Materials:

- A long sock
- Pillows

What to Do:

1. When your baby is able to sit upright, sit on the floor with her in front of you.
2. Place pillows around her to help support her.
3. Help her grasp one end of a sock as you hold the other end.
4. Gently pull the sock towards you.
5. Encourage her to pull the sock towards her so that the two of you are rocking back and forth.
6. Talk about what you are doing. Say, “You’re pulling the sock. We’re moving back and forth.”

⚠ Safety Alert! Do this type of activity in an open area that is away from furniture that has sharp edges or corners.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)



Toddlers

As your toddler is strengthening the small muscles in her fingers and hands, she is also learning to coordinate her movements, especially those of her eyes and hands. You may notice that her grip may still involve her entire hand; however, she will begin to pick up things using her forefinger and thumb as her muscles and coordination get stronger.

The more she is exposed to activities and challenging tasks that require the use of her small muscles, the more your toddler will progress in developing her fine motor skills. For example, when you first give her a jumbo crayon, she may only be able to grasp it in her fist. Over time, given the opportunity to use and experiment with the crayon, she will use it to scribble.

The following are some fun learning activities and materials that you can introduce to your toddler:

♡ **Play dough.** Begin by giving her play dough without any tools and encourage her to poke,



pull, squeeze, and pound it. Then provide simple tools, such as cookie cutters or rolling pins to use, to add variety and interest.

♡ **Jumbo crayons, washable markers, and paper.** Provide a variety of paper for scribbling on: recycled paper bags, greeting cards, newspaper, wrapping paper, etc. Use a variety of surfaces for your child to draw on. For example, tape large sheets of paper on a wall or refrigerator for your child to freely draw on – drawing on a vertical surface requires your child to hold the crayon differently, making her use different muscles.

Activity for Toddlers: *Fun with Finger Play*

What to Do:

1. Show your child how to act out the words of the poem below. Repeat the words and actions so she can learn it.
2. Sing this finger play to the tune of “Are you Sleeping”:

Where is thumbkin, where is thumbkin? (Hide your hands behind your back.)
Here I am, here I am. (Show your hands one at a time with thumbs up.)
How are you today, sir? (Shake thumb on one hand.)
Very well, I thank you. (Shake thumb on the other hand.)
Run away, run away. (Put hands behind your back one at a time.)
3. Substitute other fingers one at a time for thumbkin as you sing the remaining five more verses:

Where is pointer? (Use index finger.)
Where is middle man? (Use middle finger.)
Where is ring man? (Use ring finger.)
Where is pinkie? (Use baby finger.)
Where’s the whole family? (Use whole hand.)



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)

Preschoolers

Your preschooler will show increased ability to control and coordinate the use of her small muscles. With your guidance and with practice, she may be able to perform more self-help skills such as buttoning her shirt, putting toothpaste on her toothbrush, or pouring milk from a small pitcher into a cup. She may have an easier time manipulating tools such as small, child-size scissors with increasing control and using writing tools such as crayons and pencils to make vertical, horizontal and circular strokes.

The following are some fun learning activities and materials that you can introduce to your preschooler:

- ♥ **Small tongs to pick up small objects, such as cotton balls, pom-poms, or small toys.** Have her transfer the objects from one bowl to another. As she masters picking up objects with the tongs, replace the tongs with tweezers and

use with smaller objects, such as beans, string, or macaroni.

- ♥ **Lacing cards.** Make lacing cards by punching holes around the edges of a piece of cardboard, which you can cut into different shapes. Wrap the tip of one end of a piece of string or yarn with tape (to make the tip strong). Have your child use the string/yarn to thread in and out of the holes.



Activities for Preschoolers: *Color Wheel*

Materials:

- Light cardboard such as a manila file folder or cereal box
- 8- or 9-inch paper plate
- Scissors (for adult use only)
- Washable markers or jumbo crayons
- Six wooden clothespins

What to Do:

1. Place an 8 to 9" plate over the cardboard and trace around it to make a circle. Cut out the circle.
2. Draw lines to divide the circle into six equal parts (pie pieces).
3. Have your child color each of the pie pieces with a different color.
4. Have your child color each wooden clothespin to match the color of each pie piece.
5. Encourage her to clip the colored clothespin to the matching color on the wheel.
6. Discuss the color names with her as she matches the clothespins to the color wheel. For example, "What color is this clothespin? Do you see anything else that's blue in the room? Can you find some red toys in this room?"

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)



How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

Physical Development

- ♥ Use and strengthen small muscles
- ♥ Learn to use her body with intention

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Build trust in you and other important people
- ♥ Develop a close bond with you

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language
- ♥ Increase her observation, listening and understanding skills, and her attention span

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Understand cause-and-effect
- ♥ Develop her thinking and problem-solving skills

Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons. As you do this recipe with your child, show her how to safely handle the items and allow her to do as much as she is capable of. Ask questions throughout the process to encourage her thinking skills. Make sure to wash your hands and your child's hands before preparing any food.

Lasagna Roll-Ups

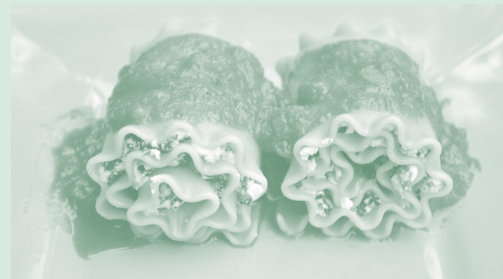
Adapted from: <http://pbskids.org/zoom/activities/cafe/lasagnarollups.html>

Ingredients:

- 8 ounces lasagna noodles (about ½ box),
cooked according to directions on box
- 2 cups ricotta cheese
- 1 cup grated mozzarella cheese
- 2 eggs lightly beaten
- Jar spaghetti sauce

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350° F.
2. Pour half of the spaghetti sauce onto the bottom of a 9x13 baking dish. Talk about the taste and color of the sauce.
3. With your child, taste the ricotta and mozzarella cheese. Talk about their differences. Have your child help mix the ricotta cheese, mozzarella cheese, and the eggs into a bowl.
4. Lay a lasagna noodle on a flat surface. Have your child spoon 2 Tablespoons of the cheese mixture onto each noodle. Help her spread out the mixture, leaving a little room at the ends and on the sides.
5. Together, roll up each noodle starting from one end and rolling it to make a log shape. Then, place the noodle, seam down, into the dish.
6. Have your child repeat the process with your help until all the noodles and cheese mixture is used.
7. After all of the noodles are in the dish, pour the rest of the spaghetti sauce onto each noodle.
8. Bake for 15 minutes.



Community Resources

Supporting Physical Development in Young Children

<http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/yf/famsci/fs633.pdf>

Information, activities, and developmental milestones associated with physical development in young children.

Hands-On Activities for Child Care

<http://www.extension.org/pages/25442/hands-on-activities-for-child-care#.Vg7gdvVhBd>

List of hundreds of activities that you can do with your child. Search by age of child, type of activity, and skills learned.



Suggested Books

Recommended by **Hawaii State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes by Mem Fox

The rhyming text describes babies born in different places and circumstances, showing what they all have in common.

The Cheerios Play Book by Lee Wade

An interactive book with places to add the dry cereal “Cheerios” to complete the picture.

Preschoolers

From Head to Toe by Eric Carle

This interactive book will increase preschooler’s hand, eye, and feet coordination by acting like various animals. While reading aloud, have your child do the movements/poses of each animal.

Fish is Fish by Leo Lionni

A young minnow and a tadpole are best friends until tadpole grows legs and becomes a frog. As both the minnow and frog grow older, they grow apart as friends. Frog leaves the water to explore the land while minnow becomes a full-fledged fish. In the end, despite their new-found physical differences, the frog and minnow realize that they will always be friends.



Learning to Grow is a project of the University of Hawai‘i, Windward Community College, with funding from the Hawai‘i Department of Human Services. Visit our website at www.learningtogrowhawaii.org