

Developing Grasps Activity Ideas



Babies start to use their hands from around 8 weeks old to learn and explore the world around them. From 6 months old, they are able to use their hands with more purpose to reach out and grasp objects. From around 11 months, they may be able to pick up a tiny crumb between their thumb and index finger (a pincer grasp).

How you hold an object impacts on the amount of control you have. If all your fingers are “fighting” to do a job, then you have less chance of completing it successfully.

Two grasps which give the most control over fine motor tasks and improve dexterity are the pincer grasp and the tripod grasp.



A pincer grasp uses only the thumb and index finger; this grip is really good for picking up small things, e.g., raisins, counters, beads. Overall, pincer grasp patterns are generally well developed by the age of 5 but strength, dexterity and precision will continue to develop.



A tripod grasp uses the thumb, index finger and middle finger; this grip is really good for manipulation, e.g., using a pencil or tying shoelaces. A tripod grasp develops over a number of stages. It then generally evolves from a static tripod grasp, where the fourth and pinkie finger do not tuck into the palm, to a dynamic tripod grasp where the fingers are actively moving an object, such as a pencil to write, with two fingers tucked, when children are between the ages of 6 and 7.



Static Tripod Grasp



Dynamic Tripod Grasp

General Advice

- Our hands work as a team, with one “busy or doing hand” which is our dominant hand and a “helping hand” which is our non-dominant hand. When carrying out activities to develop both grasps, encourage your child to practice using their dominant hand. This allows their hand dominance to become more established which in turn, helps them be able to carry out more refined and controlled movements.
- Have your child seated in a suitable sized chair with their hips flex at 90 degrees, feet flat on floor (or footplate), bottom and back supported. Ensure your child is sitting close to the table and that it is at the right height with their elbows comfortably supported.
- Provide a demonstration for your child before they start an activity. Show them to how to hold the object with the grasp you are looking to develop.
- Watch them carry out the activity and provide them with lots of encouragement with reminders on how to hold their thumb and fingers. If they find it too tricky on their first attempt, make it a bit easier and progress slowly. You can provide additional help by placing your hands on top of theirs to guide their movements.
- Practice, practice, practice!! Regular practice will help them to develop these grasps.



Pincer Grasp Activities



To help them isolate the fingers needed for this grasp, ask them to hold a small item against their palm, using their pinkie, ring and middle fingers. Activities for a pincer grasp: -

- Make jewellery with beads, buttons or pasta shapes. Pick up the beads etc with a pincer grasp using their “busy” hand. Pinch the thread or lace with a pincer grasp using their “helping” hand.

- Use playdough and pinch along the back of a sausage shape to create spines for a dinosaur, or crocodile. Hide small beads inside the dough for them to find and pick out.

- Peel off stickers and add them to pictures. You could try making a collage, adding extra beads, feathers, sequins googly eyes etc to the picture.



- Use tweezers to pick up and move small items, e.g., frozen peas, raisins, pieces of cereal, craft pompoms, chocolate buttons etc. Have a small container at the side where they can drop the items. You can have a race to see who can collect the most items!

- Play games such as "Bedbugs". This is a commercially available game. This requires the child to use tweezers to pick up game pieces. Travel board games such as Connect 4 or Snakes and Ladders have very small counters and dice which need a pincer grasp to pick them up.



- Use drawing boards such as Etch a Sketch where they have to turn the knobs using pincer grasps.

- Use Hama beads. The small beads can be used to create patterns and pictures, which are then ironed to melt them to bond together. The beads are very small so need to be picked up using a pincer grasp.

- For older children try sewing and threading kits. The needles or thread should be grasped using a pincer grasp. Encourage them to keep the needle in their "busy" hand and not to swap hands.

- Popping bubble wrap – especially the large bubbles.

- Have races with wind-up toys such as pocket money toys or bath toys. These need a pincer grasp to wind them up.



Tripod Grasp Activities

Try these activity ideas to develop tripod grasp. You will see that some of the activities are the same as for pincer grasp so use larger tools or items to make it easier to grasp with three fingers instead of two.

To help keep your child's other two fingers out of the way, they can tuck a pompom or bead against their palm, using two fingers to hold it in place instead of three.

- Tweezer or tong games. For younger children, use tongs instead and larger items to pick up. Make sure the child holds the tweezer/tongs with three fingers. Ask them to pick up items such as pompoms or rolled up pieces of paper and move them to a different pot.



- Clothes pegs allows children to use their tripod grasp when squeezing the peg to open. They could hang up dolls clothes or to help hang out the washing. If you have wooden pegs, you can write or draw on them and ask your child to spell words such as their name or match up pictures.



- Paint pictures using a chunky paint brush or chucks, holding them with three fingers. Sprinkle glitter onto the painting.
- Use nuts and bolts for your child to thread on and off. They should hold the bolt with their “helping” hand and rotate the nut with their “busy” hand.

- Use spray bottles with a trigger. Fill with water and try some outdoor games or play in the bath/shower. Stick foam letters to glass and squirt specific letters; squirt to knock over light weight toys or cups; draw with chalk outside and trace the letters using the water. They could even water the plants.



- Colour in using chunky triangular pencils or crayons. The shape of these support a tripod grasp. If the pencils and crayons are very short, this can encourage them to hold it with three fingers rather than less mature grasps such as a palmer grasp.



Further resources:

For more resources to help with developing skills or for further helpful tips and tricks, please visit our website or lookout for our Facebook posts.

www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/cypot

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