

Young babies develop their hand skills by touching; reaching; exploring, and grasping. Medical conditions can affect how your baby uses her hands.

How do young babies typically use their hands?

Around **3 months** of age babies can hold onto a small toy put into their hand; will reach for and touch dangling toys; and will explore their own hands and objects with their mouth.

Around **6 months** of age babies start to use their whole hand to grasp toys and objects and like to take toys to their mouth for exploring. At this stage babies start to sit with some support. As their ability to sit by themselves develops, this frees their hands to hold and play with toys and objects.

Around **9 months** of age babies are able to sit alone and can reach for and play with toys and objects. They use their arms to roll, creep or attempt to crawl. They can hold two toys, one in each hand; pass toys from one hand to the other; grasp toys between their fingers and thumb; poke objects with their index finger; and start to let go of toys against a surface, such as a tray on a high chair.

Helpful strategies

- ▶ Have fun playing with your baby and encourage her to use her arms and hands to touch, reach, grasp, hold and explore a variety of toys and objects.
- ▶ Help your baby to use her hands by showing her how and if necessary guide her. For example, demonstrate shaking a rattle, then place the rattle in her hand and help her to shake it.
- ▶ Encourage your baby to use her hands in a variety of different positions including lying on her back or tummy, sitting in your lap, sitting in a rocker chair or a high chair.
- ▶ Reward your baby when she tries to use her hands by smiling, kissing, clapping or cheering her efforts.

Please contact your occupational therapist if you have any queries about the above information.

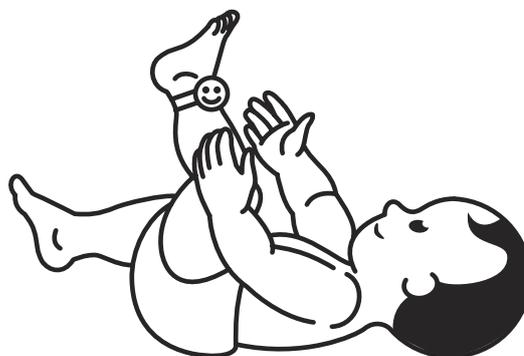


General activities

Some of these activities will require supervision.

- ▶ Position a play gym/frame above your baby or dangle toys to encourage him to reach, touch or catch the toys when they are swinging. To keep this activity interesting, try hanging different things from the play gym.
- ▶ Have a basket of toys for your baby to hold and explore. Choose toys that are easy to hold, are colourful or make a noise. For example, rattles, soft balls, cloth books, blocks, soft cuddly toys, squeeze toys, roly-poly toys, colourful scarves, busy rings and nesting cups. Make sure that all toys are safe.
- ▶ To help your baby become aware of his hands and arms, play games such as blowing raspberries, 'Round and Round the Garden' and 'This Little Piggy Went to Market'.
- ▶ Play peek-a-boo. Cover your face with a scarf and say 'Where's mummy/daddy?' Then uncover your face and say 'Peek-a-boo'. Repeat several times, encouraging your baby to pull the scarf from your face. Then cover your baby's face and say 'Where's baby?'.
- ▶ Play hide and seek. Show your baby a toy that he likes. Then hide it under a scarf. Encourage your baby to pull on the scarf to find the toy.
- ▶ Make a tower of blocks and encourage your baby to knock them down. If your baby tends to use one hand only, build the tower closer to the other hand to encourage its use.
- ▶ Help your baby reach for his feet when he is lying on his back. Attach feet or wrist rattles around his ankles.

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Everyday activities

Some of these activities will require supervision.

- ▶ When changing your baby's nappy give her some favourite toys to hold and play with. Similarly, when your baby is in her pram or in the car, give her something to reach for, touch or play with.
- ▶ When you are holding or cuddling your baby encourage her to reach out and touch your nose, hair or jewellery with her hands.
- ▶ If your baby is up to eating finger foods, encourage her to use her hands to pick up and hold the food.
- ▶ If your baby drinks from a bottle or sipper cup, help her to hold onto the bottle or cup with both hands. Gradually decrease the amount of help you provide.
- ▶ When you are in the kitchen have your baby close by – in a rocker chair, high chair or on the floor. Let your baby hold onto and play with a feeding spoon, wooden spoon, measuring cups and other unbreakable items.
- ▶ During bath-time, encourage your baby to play simple splashing games. Have a variety of easy to hold bath toys to play with, such as a rubber duck or a boat. Have fun finding, catching, and pushing the toys.
- ▶ Hold your baby in front of a mirror and encourage her to reach out and touch her reflection with both hands.

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