

Babies develop their hand skills by touching, reaching, exploring and grasping. Medical conditions can affect how your baby uses his hands.

### How do older babies typically use their hands?

Between **9 and 12 months** of age babies can sit by themselves and can reach for and play with toys and objects. They use their arms for crawling and pulling to stand. They can pick up small objects between their thumb and index finger; they start to develop more control when releasing or letting go of toys and objects; and they begin to understand that objects have a purpose such as, a spoon is used to take food to your mouth and a telephone is held to your ear.

Between **12 and 18 months** of age babies start to become more skilled with their hands. They start to show more accuracy when picking up and placing toys, and they can use one hand to hold a toy and the other to play and manipulate the toy. They also may start to use a crayon to scribble, take off their socks, hold a cup or use a spoon.



### Helpful strategies

- ▶ Have fun with your baby and encourage him to use both arms and hands to play with a variety of toys and objects. Through play activities your child will develop and practice his hand skills. Encourage your child to reach for, hold, pass from hand to hand and manipulate toys and objects. If your child tends to use only one hand, position the toys near the other hand. Alternatively, use large toys so that two hands are required or give your child two different toys to hold, one in each hand.



- ▶ Help your baby to use his hands by showing him how and if necessary guide him. For example, demonstrate how to put a shape into a shape sorter, then place the shape in his hand and help him to put it in.
- ▶ Encourage your baby to use his hands in a variety of different positions including sitting on the floor (with support if needed), sitting in a high chair, lying on his back or tummy, crawling, pulling to stand, supported standing and walking.
- ▶ Reward your baby when he tries to use his hands by smiling, kissing, clapping or cheering his efforts.

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

### General activities

#### Some of these activities will require supervision

- ▶ Have a basket of toys for your baby to hold and explore. For example, rattles, soft balls, large beads on a string, cloth and board books, blocks, teddies or dolls, nesting cups, rings to stack, shape sorter, toy telephone, toy cars, musical instruments and activity boards. Make sure that all toys are safe.
- ▶ Position interesting toys out of your child's reach to encourage your child to crawl.



- ▶ Set up a tunnel or an obstacle course for your child to crawl through.
- ▶ Place an interesting toy on a low table or couch to encourage your child to pull up to stand.
- ▶ Play with and carry large soft toys.
- ▶ Roll, chase, throw and carry large balls.
- ▶ Play clapping games and action songs such as 'Pat-a-Cake', 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' or 'This Is the Way We Wash Our Hands'.
- ▶ Burst bubbles by clapping hands together.
- ▶ Play on a ride-on toy, holding on with both hands. Provide your baby with as much help as she needs to have a fun and safe ride.
- ▶ Water play – fill up a shallow container with water. Splash, pour water into cups, or use a sponge to wash a dolly or clean a ball.

- ▶ Hold on and push a trolley, pram, mobile activity centre or a ride on toy. This activity may require additional weight in the trolley or ride-on toy.



- ▶ Sand play – dig, build castles, pour or mix.
- ▶ Go to a park that has a baby swing and encourage your child to hold on with both hands.
- ▶ Build a tower with 2 – 3 blocks.
- ▶ Make your child a posting box using a tissue box or container. Post blocks, ping pong balls, pegs and other small and medium size toys.
- ▶ Play musical instruments such as maracas, drums, or a xylophone.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Place a couple of small toys in a paper bag. Crumple the bag closed, shake it and hand it to your child. Help her to find the toys. Encourage her to put the toys in the bag and crumple the bag closed.
- ▶ Encourage your child to look at and turn pages in a book.

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### Everyday activities

Some of these activities will require supervision.

- ▶ When changing your baby's nappy give him some favourite toys to hold and play with. Similarly, when your baby is in his pram or in the car, give him something to play with.
- ▶ Encourage your child to help when getting dressed by lifting up his arms when taking off a top, taking off socks, finding shoes, etc.
- ▶ At snack time encourage your child to eat finger foods with both hands.
- ▶ At mealtimes let your child play with and have a go at using a spoon.
- ▶ Encourage your child to drink from a cup using two hands.
- ▶ In the kitchen let your child play with a saucepan, wooden spoon, measuring cups and other unbreakable items.
- ▶ During bath-time play with toys, containers, plastic spoons, sponges and bubbles. Encourage your child to use his hands to play, splash, pour, stir, wash and find toys.
- ▶ Encourage your child to wave goodbye with one hand then the other hand.
- ▶ After playtime, encourage your child to help pack away his toys into a toy box or basket.

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