

Toddlers develop their hand skills by playing, exploring and using their hands to do everyday activities such as using a spoon to eat. Medical conditions can affect how your child uses her hands.

### How do toddlers typically use their hands?

Toddlers are able to use their hands in very precise ways. They can drink from a cup, eat with a spoon, take off their socks, build block towers, turn pages of a book one at a time and are beginning to draw. As they grow and develop they decide which hand they prefer to use for the skilled part of an activity and which hand they use as the assisting hand. A hand preference usually starts to develop between the ages of 2 to 4 years; however it is common at this stage for children to swap hands.

### Helpful strategies

- ▶ Have fun playing with your child and encourage her to use her arms and hands. Through play activities your child will develop and practice her hand skills. If your child tends to use only one hand, try activities that require two hands such as riding a ride on toy or threading beads. Alternatively, ask your child to use one hand then the other hand. For example, squash a ball of playdough in one hand then the other.
- ▶ Help your child to use her hands by showing her how and if necessary guide her. For example, demonstrate how to roll playdough with a rolling pin, then help her hold onto the rolling pin with both hands and move her arms forwards and backwards.
- ▶ Encourage your child to use both her hands at every opportunity. For example, when changing her nappy or when she is in the car give her some toys to play with or a book to look at.
- ▶ Reward your child whenever she tries to use both hands. Tell her what a good job she is doing; clap and cheer her efforts; or give her a hug, a sticker or a treat.

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



### Indoor activities

Encourage your child to do these activities using both hands.

Some of these activities will require supervision.

- ▶ Imaginary play using a tea-set, teddies, dolls, a cash register, telephone, dress ups, tool kit, medical kit, large cardboard boxes or a cubby-house.
- ▶ Play with cars, trucks, trains, toy people or animals.
- ▶ Threading using large beads or lacing.
- ▶ Pop beads, Duplo or other construction toys.
- ▶ Musical instruments – these could be made using pots and pans and wooden spoons.
- ▶ Sing action songs for your child to copy such as 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star'; 'The Wheels on the Bus' or 'Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes'.
- ▶ Hand and finger puppets.
- ▶ Playdough – roll, squash, mould, or use a rolling pin and cutters.
- ▶ Cooking activities – stir whilst holding the mixing bowl with the other hand, sifting, kneading, rolling or using cookie cutters.
- ▶ Play with a bowl of rice or lentils – pouring, mixing or finding hidden toys.
- ▶ Drawing with crayons or textas while using the other hand to hold the paper steady.
- ▶ Taking lids on and off thick textas.
- ▶ Read books together. Encourage him to hold the book, turn the pages and point to the pictures.
- ▶ Simple puzzles – have some puzzle pieces to the left and some to the right to encourage your child to use both hands when fitting the pieces together.
- ▶ Build towers with blocks, nesting cups or stacking rings.
- ▶ Place some small toys in paper bags and then shake the bags and give them to your child. Then let your child unwrap and discover the toys.



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## Activity ideas to encourage toddlers to use two hands

### Outdoor activities

Encourage your child to do these activities using both hands.

Some of these activities will require supervision.

- ▶ Sand play – dig, pour, mix, build castles or drive cars.
- ▶ Water play – fill up a shallow container with water. Splash, pour water into cups, use a sponge to wash a dolly or clean a ball.
- ▶ Push and pull toy trolleys, prams and wheelbarrows.
- ▶ Ride a tricycle or ride on toy.
- ▶ Play on playground equipment that is suitable for toddlers. For example climb a ladder, go down a slide, swing on a swing, have fun on a seesaw.
- ▶ Finger paint using paint or shaving cream.
- ▶ Roll, throw and chase large balls.
- ▶ Help in the garden – water with a hose, rake or sweep, collect leaves or sticks.

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### Everyday activities

Encourage your child to do these activities using both hands.

Some of these activities will require supervision.

- ▶ At snack or meal times encourage your child to eat finger foods with both hands.
- ▶ Drink from a cup using two hands.
- ▶ Hold and eat a small packet of sultanas.
- ▶ During bath-time play splashing and clapping games, squeeze sponges, play with cups, bowls, spoons, funnels, floating and wind-up toys.
- ▶ During bath-time encourage your child to wash his tummy, face, hands or hair. Try singing 'This Is the Way We Wash Our Hands' and show him the actions that you want him to do.
- ▶ Help with dressing such as taking off socks or pants, putting arms up when getting tops on or off, or finding his shoes.
- ▶ Help around the house – pick up toys and put them into a toy box, put clothes into the dirty washing basket or into the washing machine.
- ▶ Help with shopping – carry unbreakable items (such as toilet paper), put items into the trolley.

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