

[Big muscles make a big difference to fine motor skills](#)

How often have you hear “practice makes perfect”? So often true but not always in the case of pencil skills or handwriting when floppy muscles get in the way.

All too often children are forced to practice these finger skills when they don't have the underlying strength to maintain posture, to hold the pencil correctly or to persist with a task long enough to get any benefit from the practice. It is for this reason that we often need to focus on developing strength and endurance before trying to refine our fiddly fine motor (finger) skills.

Gross motor skills are those that involve the large muscles of the body (such as the arms and legs) for running, skipping, jumping and ball skills just to name a few. [Occupational Therapy](#) is initially less concerned with the quality of the skills (such as skipping, jumping, and running) and more interested in assessing if the underlying foundation skills required for gross motor (whole body) skills are intact. Occupational Therapists assess whether the underlying core muscle strength necessary for effectively performing everyday skills is established to support a broad range of skills such as sports participation, dressing, the ability to physically navigate the environment (e.g. around chairs in the classroom) and most importantly fine motor success (such as writing and cutting) at school.

In the Australian schooling system, students are required to demonstrate their knowledge through written or typed pieces of work. For a student to have age appropriate pencil skills and/or computing skills, it is necessary to have strong gross motor foundations. **Postural strength and control** is a crucial attribute to have in order to sit at a table for extended periods of time. Only once a child is

able to maintain correct seating posture can they control the movements of the shoulder, arm, hand and fingers. Often the children that struggle with fine motor skills such as holding a pencil, writing, drawing, cutting, threading, opening lunch boxes and self care to name a few skills, have weaknesses in their muscles that are required for these skills. It is for this reason that we encourage the development of gross motor (whole body) skills in readiness for success in fine motor (finger) skills.

Pencil and scissor skills can be difficult for children due to poor postural control making maintaining posture difficult, poor finger strength to manipulate pencils, difficulty with planning and sequencing so that they cannot write letters independently or generate ideas to write, and reduced attention and concentration.

As most challenges children face are reliant upon good physical (postural) skills, you can never do too many of the following activities to improve strength and endurance:

- Swimming
- Bike riding or scooting
- Walking, running and playing in the sand
- Throwing, catching, and rolling large, lightweight, soft ball
- Playing chasey or other backyard games such as 'Follow the Leader' or 'Simon Says'
- Building and navigating obstacle courses: indoors with furniture, pillows, boxes, blankets; outdoors with rocks, logs or playground equipment
- Swinging, sliding and climbing at the playground
- Animal walks
- Jumping on the trampoline

Tips that help children participate in physical activities:

- Make the activities fun
- Have family members or peers involved in the games or activities
- Play games that do not have winners and losers
- Reduce other options for defined periods of time (i.e. no screen time in the afternoons)
- Extend the play duration by joining several games together (e.g. an

obstacle course)

Physically play your way to better finger skills by developing BIG muscles to support more controlled little muscle (finger) skills.

For more information on how you can help your child, book an appointment with our friendly Speech Therapists and Occupational Therapists on [1800 KIDSENSE](tel:1800KIDSENSE).

Contact us today to make an initial enquiry or book an assessment for your child on 1800 KID SENSE (1800 543 736)

