

Activities used to **strengthen** the small muscles of the hands involve materials and tools that provide **resistance**.

Try these materials and activities:

**Clay, play-dough, bread dough.**

- These are all excellent materials for squeezing, squishing, pushing, pulling and moulding
- Try hiding small objects (beads, pennies, beans) inside and then try pulling them out
- Use a rolling pin to flatten it out, then use cookie cutters to make shapes

**Interlocking construction toys**

- Mega Blocks, duplo, lego.
- Pop beads
- Popoids
- Linking chains

**Water play with spray bottles, water guns, squirt toys, sponges**

- Spray bottles: help water plants or spray the windows to clean, play outdoors in warm weather, add food colouring to make spray bottle pictures in the snow.
- Water guns and squirt toys: outdoor summer fun.
- Sponges: squeezing to wring out the water is great for strengthening hands and forearms. Help wash toys and dolls in the sink or water tray.

**Clothes peg games:**

- Use the *pads of the thumb and index finger* to open the clothes peg rather than pinching it open against the side of the index finger
- When pinching open, try alternating each finger to squeeze opposite the thumb.
- Place clothes pegs along the top of a container and then on top of each other to construct a design.
- Pick up small objects with the clothes pegs or large tweezers; cotton balls, pompoms, crumbled paper, beads, pegs, etc..
- Hang up pictures or plush toys on a string, like a clothesline.

## Early Years Support & Assessment Team (EYSAT)

### Hole puncher:

- Punch holes along strips of paper (1 to 2 inches wide) or along the edges of a sheet of paper or paper plate.
- Use hole punch clippings to make confetti or 'snow' to glue on paper for pictures
- Grip style hole punchers are easier for children to use, rather than the small punchers that require a strong pinch to operate.

### Bubble wrap

- Pop the bubbles on large or small bubble wrap by pinching with thumb and index finger or by pushing down on bubbles when sheet is placed on a hard surface.
- Write or paint their name onto bubble wrap and get children to pop the bubbles of their name (forming letter correctly)

### Squeeze toys and materials

- Foam balls, animals and shapes
- Tennis ball "Hungry Guy" When you squeeze the ball the mouth will open. Hide pennies, pegs, beads and other small things inside. Squeeze to open and shake out the contents, then feed the "hungry guy" by slipping in the "food". The wider the slit, the easier it will be to open the mouth wide. Start with a wide slit for young children.
- Bulb syringe or turkey baster to squirt water, or have a race by squeezing them to blow cotton balls and pompoms across a finish line.
- Craft activities that require using bottles to squeeze: glue, glitter glue, puffy paint, fabric paint, etc.

### Pinch strengthening

- Tongs, tweezers, use these to pick up small objects for sorting, such as beads, marbles, beans, pompoms and cotton balls.
- Dress up dolls: requires a surprising amount of hand strength and endurance

Placing elastic hair bands over pringles tube is a simple and effective way to develop whole hand strength.