



Empowering Children. Supporting Families. Building Brighter Futures.

Resource 004 | Developmental delays

Fine motor delay

What it means

Fine motor delay describes slower development of controlled hand and finger use. These skills support reaching, grasping, releasing, turning pages, using utensils, and later drawing or writing. The goal is useful participation, not making a young child perform adult-like precision tasks. [1]

Causes and risk factors

Hand skills can be affected by prematurity, differences in strength or tone, coordination difficulties, neurological or genetic conditions, and vision problems. Pain, limited movement, or difficulty maintaining a stable sitting position may also make hand tasks harder. Fine motor delay can occur alone or alongside delays in other areas. [1,2]

General family education. A concern deserves assessment, but this guide does not diagnose a child or prescribe treatment.



Signs and everyday impact

Families may notice difficulty reaching accurately, holding or releasing toys, using both hands together, handling age-appropriate utensils, or exploring small objects safely. A persistent difference between the two sides, unusual stiffness, or a loss of previously used hand skills deserves assessment. [1,2]

Assessment and diagnosis

An occupational therapist or developmental clinician examines hand use within play and routines, posture, coordination, strength, sensation, and visual-motor skills. History and examination guide further evaluation. Hearing, vision, communication, and cognitive needs may influence task performance and should not be overlooked. [1,2]

Treatment and therapy

Occupational therapy may use meaningful play and everyday activities to build hand skills and adapt tasks. Physical therapy can help when posture or movement limits hand use. Medical treatment addresses identified causes. Adapted grips, utensils, switches, or toys may allow success while skills develop; their use is not a failure. [1,2,3]

Support at home

Offer safe, age-appropriate toys that encourage reaching, releasing, and two-handed play. Break tasks into small steps and provide stable seating when advised. Let the child choose activities. Small items are choking hazards; supervision and suitable toy size are essential.

When to seek help

Sudden loss of hand function, pain, swelling, new weakness, or marked one-sided changes needs medical assessment. Loss of several developmental skills should be discussed promptly.

Questions for your care team

- Is the main difficulty strength, coordination, vision, posture, or planning?
- What adaptations would make meals or play easier?
- How will we measure useful progress rather than task speed alone?



Podcast preparation

Use this outline to develop a later podcast script.

Suggested opening

Welcome to Mariel Early Intervention. Today we discuss fine motor delay. Fine motor delay describes slower development of controlled hand and finger use. This is general education; each child needs individualized care.

Opening: Define the topic and its developmental context.

Understanding: Explain causes and signs without inviting self-diagnosis.

Assessment: Describe evaluation and distinguish screening from diagnosis.

Support: Discuss treatment, therapy, and practical family supports.

Closing: Explain urgent signs and one clear next step.

Misconception to address: Repeated worksheets or hand strengthening alone do not address every cause of fine motor difficulty.

Before recording: update clinical references and local service details, arrange clinical review, and use fully consented or fictional examples.

Terms in plain language

- Fine motor: controlled hand and finger movements.
- Bilateral: involving both sides.
- Visual-motor: coordinating vision and movement.

Sources and further reading

Sources accessed 3 October 2026. Numbered references support the clinical overview. Treatment availability and referral routes vary by country.

[1] Assessing Developmental Delays in Children

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Assessing-Developmental-Delays.aspx>

[2] Developmental coordination disorder: MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001533.htm>

[3] Is Your Baby's Physical Development on Track?

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Is-Your-Babys-Physical-Development-on-Track.aspx>