

Studies have shown that playing with playdough has a significant influence on the development of fine motor skills (Darizal et.al, 2023). Manipulating playdough supports hand muscle strength, finger dexterity, crossing midline, eye-hand coordination, and functional grasping patterns. Many children are often tempted to eat playdough, engaging in oral sensory-seeking behaviors. Here are some fun recipes you can try with your child so they can safely engage with playdough!

Edible Playdough Recipes

Marshmallow Play Dough:

6 large marshmallows
2 teaspoons coconut oil
Food coloring
4 tablespoons cornstarch
Warm marshmallows and coconut oil in microwave for 30 seconds, stir in a few drops of food coloring, stir in the cornstarch. When the dough is cool enough to handle, start kneading it.

*Continue to add cornstarch if too sticky

Feel free to add edible glitter, gold flakes or sprinkles to make it more colorful. To save the dough after playtime is over, stash it in the fridge in a sealed tupperware container

Vanilla Play Dough:

1 cup store-bought icing (you pick the color!)
2 to 2 ¾ cups powdered sugar
Put icing in a mixer and slowly add in the powdered sugar until the dough is no longer sticky.

Peanut Butter Play Dough:

1 cup smooth peanut butter
2 ¾ cups powdered sugar
Mix ingredients together well to form the dough; chill dough in the fridge for 20 minutes until firm

Playdough Activities

Strengthening:

- Squeeze
- Pull play dough apart or put it together
- Roll with hands or rolling pin
- Poke
- Squish
- Flatten
- Use cookie cutters, extruders, etc.

Finger isolation/dexterity:

- Poke play dough with each finger
- Roll small balls by breaking off small pieces then rolling it in between the pads of the thumb and the index finger
- Flatten small balls, squeezing them between thumb and other fingers
- Squash balls that are placed on the table with each finger
- Hide objects in the play dough, pressing them down with each finger

Crossing Midline:

- Encourage your child to pick up/place items into play dough on either side of them
- Sort out small items hidden in playdough by colors, letters, etc., and place them into containers located on both the right and left side of the table.
- Pick up small play dough balls on either side of the table, crossing their midline.
- Encourage your child to create a long snake, then pinch it across the top

Facilitating thumb opposition:

- Use tongs to put things into or remove from the playdough
- Push toothpicks, straws, candles, etc. into playdough
- Push small items into playdough (i.e. coins, seeds, dry pasta, beads, small toys, etc)
- Rolling small pieces between the thumb and the index finger making small balls
- Flatten small balls by squeezing them between the thumb and index finger

Eye-hand Coordination:

- Mold shapes/letters
- Use play dough worksheets and paste dough onto them
- Place dry spaghetti into play dough, then string dry pasta or cereal onto it

Bilateral Coordination:

- Squeeze, push, pull, and manipulate play dough with two hands
- Roll play dough with hands or rolling pin
- Cut play dough with scissors
- Use dough extruders, cookie cutters, etc.
- Cut play dough with a toy knife
- Mold play dough

Letter/Number Recognition & Formation:

- Create letters and spell out words
- Add and subtract pieces hidden in play dough
- Involve your child in making the play dough to practice measuring and mixing ingredients

References

Darizal, D., Sutapa, P., Suhartini, B., Sabillah, M. I., & Annasai, F. (2023). The effect of playdough play on early childhood fine motor improvement in Yogyakarta national kindergarten. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis*, 06(03), 879–883. <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijmra/v6-i3-04>