

Tips for helping children stay active during and after childhood cancer treatment

Key points

- Physical activity has many health benefits, including gross motor development, acquisition of functional skills, maintaining a healthy body weight and positively impacting mental health.
- A lack of physical activity can lead to other chronic illnesses such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes in the future.
- The CCF Psychosocial and Supportive Care Programme for Paediatric Oncology (CCF PSCP) is a comprehensive support programme for childhood cancer in Singapore. Allied health professionals (including music therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech therapists) support children to maintain and improve their functional skills through rehabilitation.
- Physical activity guidelines for children with cancer have been developed (The International Paediatric Oncology Exercise Guidelines (iPOEG, 2021).



Here are some tips to encourage your child to stay active!



Check with your child's oncologist and/or allied health professional before starting any physical activity.

Every child responds to cancer treatment differently and there may be times that your child needs rest and to avoid activity.

Chose to move. Do what you can. Do it when you can.

Movement is possible and important for every child and adolescent with cancer: across all ages, abilities, stages and phases and across all settings (in-patient, community, school, day-care).

Make it fun!

Ensure the activity is age appropriate. Physical activity is anything that raises your heart rate, increases your breathing or strengthens your muscles. Younger children like to play – so you can make it into a game (for example, hide and seek or an egg and spoon race). Adolescents may enjoy activities such as yoga or listening to music whilst they exercise.

Be a role model.

Children observe you! If your child sees you being active and having fun, they're more likely to join in too.



Involve the whole family. Create a family culture of being active.

Siblings are a great motivator. Rather than staying at home and watching a movie, head out for a walk together. If your child is on active cancer treatment, avoid crowded spaces. Be creative, if your child needs to stay at home due to low immunity, encourage games at home instead.



Incorporate daily chores.

Some household chores such as putting away toys, helping to wipe surfaces or help with the laundry are great ways to sneak in some activity!

Pace the activity and take regular breaks.

Adjust the activity to your child's energy levels – each day may be different. For example, after a tough round of chemo, your child may need a little more rest, allow them to take breaks.



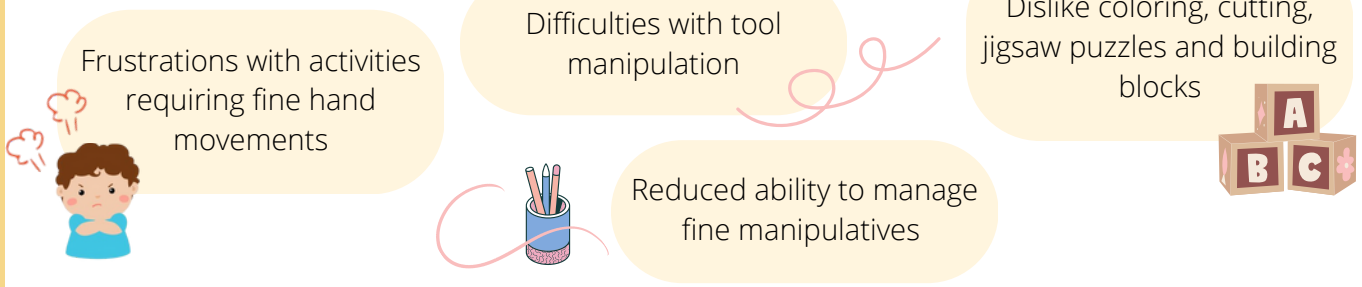
Helping children in developing fine motor skills

What are fine motor skills?

- Ability to accurately and effectively coordinate small muscles of the hands, fingers and thumb
- Involve strength, fine motor control, in-hand manipulation and dexterity
- Weaknesses in fine motor skills can affect a child's ability to write legibly, turn pages in a book, and perform Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) such as feeding, dressing and grooming



Observable behaviours






What can Occupational Therapists do to help?

Occupational therapy focuses on helping people optimize their performance in activities of daily living. Occupational therapists can help children improve their cognitive, physical, and motor skills to enhance their participation in school, play and leisure.

Occupational therapists help children work on fine motor skills so that they can grasp and release toys and develop handwriting skills. In addition, occupational therapy addresses hand-eye coordination, which is required to improve children's fine motor skills.

Suggested fine motor activities!

<p>Lacing board: make simple boards by punching holes around the edge of cardboard shapes or cards.</p> 	<p>Playdoh: using fingers to roll small balls, roll dough to make noodles, pinching to make balls, pressing dough flat to make 'pancakes'.</p>	<p>Use hand-pump squirt bottle or water guns to spray water on plants or other objects.</p>	<p>Squeezing pegs: make "cages for zoo animals by squeezing pegs around the outside of a container</p> 	<p>Pencil Olympics: using only your preferred hand, rotate a pencil from finger to finger or "crawl" your fingers from one end of the pencil to the other.</p>
<p>Origami: e.g. paper planes, fans, cranes.</p> 	<p>Roll scraps of colored paper into balls, using thumb, index and middle fingers. Glue the balls onto a picture.</p>	<p>Threading: using beads, plastic tubing or plastic straws.</p>	<p>Connecting paper clips to make chains, necklaces, bracelets.</p>	<p>Use tweezers to pick up beads and put it in a container.</p> 