

# I Can Do It Myself!



**Dressing and other daily living skills  
for children with one-arm weakness**

**SickKids®**

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# Overview

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## Who is this booklet for?

This booklet has been written for parents, caregivers, therapists, and teachers of children with obstetrical brachial plexus palsy (OBPP), however, it can be used for other children with one-armed weakness. This includes conditions such as cerebral palsy (hemiplegia), stroke, and one sided congenital hand difference.

Despite the difference in their arms, these children can adapt well to their daily activities. What is important is that they are given the chance to try and practice these skills. At first, the child may need extra time to finish a task due to weak muscles. At other times, he or she may need adaptive techniques or aids. It is important to be patient. Sometimes this means allowing the child to struggle as they learn to problem solve on their own. The reward of this is a child who is confident and capable.

## How to use this booklet

For each skill, a **KEY STRATEGY** is given as a general rule to follow.

**TIPS** and **STYLES** are specific suggestions to make these daily living skills easier.

**DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES** are given as a guide to compare the child's skills to other children of the same age.

## Be creative!

Many of the strategies in this booklet are ideas from the families of children with OBPP. You and the child with OBPP are your best source of ideas! You do not have to spend a lot of money to buy fancy equipment. You can make a lot of adaptations at home. Be creative!

# Shirts

## Putting on pull-over shirts (t-shirts, sweaters)

**KEY STRATEGY:** Put the weaker arm into the sleeve first.

With your child sitting, place the t-shirt on their lap, face down with the top of the shirt furthest away from their body.

### Option 1:



Use stronger arm to help weak arm slide inside sleeve.



Pull t-shirt over head with stronger arm. If possible, use weak arm to help.



Put stronger arm in sleeve. Pull down shirt.

### TIPS

- Make sure your child is sitting securely
- Sit in front of a mirror so your child can see what they are doing

**Option 2:**

Use strong arm to help weak arm slide inside sleeve.



Put stronger arm into other sleeve.



Flip shirt over and through the head opening using the stronger arm. If possible, use weak arm to help.

**DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES****By 3 years**

- Put on a pullover shirt

**By 4 years**

- Remove pullover shirt
- Know front and back of clothing

## Taking off pull-over shirts (t-shirts, sweaters)

**KEY STRATEGY:** Remove stronger arm from sleeve first, then use the stronger arm to help take off the rest of the shirt.

Depending on the child's condition, there are different ways to take off a shirt. Work with the child to find out what works best. Your occupational therapist can also guide you.



### Option 1:

Hold bottom of the shirt with stronger arm and wrap elbow inside the bottom of the shirt.



Use stronger arm to pull shirt over the head.



Use stronger arm to remove sleeve off weak arm.

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**Option 2:**

Grab the shirt at the back of the neck with stronger arm.



Bend head and neck forward and pull shirt over head with stronger arm.



Use stronger arm to pull sleeve off weak arm.



Wiggle off shirt from stronger arm. If possible, use weak arm to help.

## Putting on front opening shirts or coats

**KEY STRATEGY:** Put the weaker arm into the sleeve first.



Use strong arm to help weak arm slide inside sleeve.



Use strong arm to pull shirt over weak shoulder.



Put strong arm into the sleeve.

### STYLE

- Stretch fabric (e.g. knit) and loose fit
- Rib knit neckline
- Large sleeve openings
- Easy opening for head
- large crew neck
- v-neck
- scoop neck



## Taking off front opening shirts or coats

**KEY STRATEGY:** Take out stronger arm from sleeve first, then use stronger arm to take off rest of the shirt.



Wiggle the shirt off the stronger shoulder using weak arm to help.



If needed, use teeth to pull sleeve off.



Use stronger arm to take off sleeve from weak arm.

### DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

By 2 years

- Removes coat or large shirt that opens at the front (both are unfastened)

# Pants

## Putting on pants

**KEY STRATEGY:** Weaker arm pulls pants up in the front. Stronger arm pulls pants up at the back.

Children with OBPP find it hard to pull up their pants at the side. This is because their hand is weak and it is hard for them to move their shoulder.



With your child sitting, use stronger arm to put opposite foot into pant leg. Use weak arm to help guide the pants.



Use stronger arm to pull foot into pant leg. Use weak arm to guide the pants.



With the child standing, use stronger arm to pull the pants from the back. Use weak arm to pull pants up from the front.

### DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

#### By 3 years

- Pulls down pants on their own

#### By 4 years

- Pulls pants up

Loops can be sewn inside the waistband of the pants on the side of the weak arm. The child can hook the weak hand into the loop to pull the pants up. Use plastic or magnetic buckles and don't use belts if possible.



### STYLE

- Use loose fitting pants and elasticized waistbands
- Choose jeans that are stretchy or less stiff
- Jean buttons are difficult to use. Use velcro, snaps or elastic thread instead. (See buttons, zippers and fasteners section)

# Socks and shoes

## Putting on socks and shoes

**KEY STRATEGY:** Practice, practice, practice. Use adaptations if needed.



With your child sitting, use the stronger hand to put the sock over the toes and then the heel. The weaker hand can help guide the sock.

### TIPS & STYLE

- Put talc powder or cornstarch on the child's foot and inside the sock to help the foot slide into the sock easier
- Fold or roll top part of the sock down over the foot of the sock before putting them on
- Sew a loop on the top inside of the sock so the child can hook the weak hand into the loop for more control

#### Socks

- Tube socks
- Oversized socks
- Stretch fabric (Lycra) socks

#### Shoes

- Velcro is preferred
- Flat laces are easier to grip
- Elastic shoelaces
- Spring tension blocks
- Shoehorn

### DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

#### By 3 years

- Pulls sock over toes, but may have difficulty finding the proper place for the heel

#### By 4 years

- Puts socks on by themselves

# Shoelaces and lacing exercises

## Tying shoelaces

**KEY STRATEGY:** Use mostly one-handed strategy. Use the weaker hand to help. Only use this strategy if the child's hand is very weak. Otherwise use a regular bow knot.



Make an "X" with stronger hand to cross laces.



Place upper lace under "X" with stronger hand. Pull lace through with stronger hand.



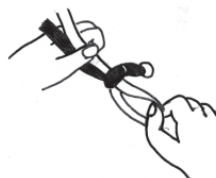
Grab the ends of each lace. The weaker hand can use a key pinch or press the lace against the shoe with the back of the hand while pulling the other lace with stronger hand.



Cross laces again to make an "X" with stronger hand.



Place upper lace through the centre to make a loop.



Pinch the two ends of the laces with weaker hand or press the laces against the shoe with the back of the hand while the stronger hand pulls loop until tight.

### DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

#### By 4 years

- Laces shoe with some help

#### By 6 years

- Ties bow knot with shoelaces

#### By 5 years

- Laces and knots shoes

## Lacing exercises

Be creative and make lacing practice lots of fun. First begin with lacing activities, then practice with the child's shoes off and placed in front of them. Use wide laces of two different colours when first teaching the child.

First show the child how to lace and then repeat this again talking through the steps aloud. Ask the child to try lacing while you repeat the steps aloud. Allow them to do as much as they can without getting frustrated. Repeat the steps aloud if needed. Repeat.

### TIPS

- Lacing cards and activities



- Purchase or make homemade tie books



- Wrapping packages to practice making bows



# Buttons and buttoning exercises

## Buttons

**KEY STRATEGY:** Practice, practice, practice.

Children with OBPP should be encouraged to practice buttoning at an early age. Buttoning is also a good exercise for your child to use both hands.

### TIPS & STYLES

- Flat, large textured buttons with contrasting colours



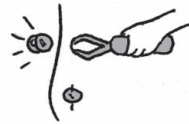
- Snaps



- Buttons with shanks



- Button hooks



- Velcro



- Sew buttons with elastic thread or sew buttons on loosely



### DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

**By 4 years**

- Laces shoe with some help

**By 6 years**

- Ties bow knot with shoelaces

**By 5 years**

- Laces and knots shoes

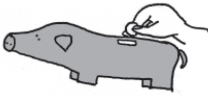
## Buttoning exercises

Be creative and make buttoning practice fun. First teach the child front buttons, then side, and then back buttons. Use large, loosely sewn buttons of contrasting colour when first starting out.

First show the child how to button and then repeat this again talking through the steps aloud. Ask the child to try to button while you repeat the steps aloud. Allow them to do as much as they can without getting frustrated. Repeat the steps aloud if needed. Repeat.

### TIPS

- Start with activities that put coins/chips into a slot (e.g. put pennies into piggy bank or a slit in the lid of a plastic container)
- Purchase or make homemade button boards or button books



- Practice buttoning on dolls and toys or play dress-up



# Zippers

**KEY STRATEGY:** Practice, practice, practice

## TIPS

- Use nylon coil zippers
- Replace zipper with velcro
- Use large ring or keychain to create a larger zipper pull for better grasp



## DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

### By 3 years

- Unzips zipper

### By 4 years

- Child is able to insert zipper into shank

# Accessories

**KEY STRATEGY:** Support the weak arm on a countertop surface at shoulder height. (See hair styling section, pg. 15).

## TIPS

- Support your weak arm on a table or countertop surface at shoulder height to reach the necklace clasp or earrings.
  - Use elastic chains
  - Slip on necklaces
  - Use a mirror
  - Secure clasp in the front
  - Wear a front closing bra or do the clasp in the front and then turn the bra around





# Hair care

## Hair styling

**KEY STRATEGY:** Keep a simple hair cut. Support your weak arm on a counter-top at shoulder height to place weak hand behind head.

### TIPS & STYLES

- Simple hair style



- Hair accessories: butterfly clips, scrunchies, spring clips, hair bands



- Short hair cut



**KEY STRATEGY:** Support the weak arm on a countertop surface at shoulder height to reach hand behind head.

Children with OBPP may have weakness in lifting their arm up to reach the back of their head. Some children can adapt by using their stronger arm to place the weak arm behind their head. Other children use a countertop at shoulder height to support their weak arm.

### TIP

- Support elbow on the countertop at shoulder height and use a mirror



# Hygiene

**KEY STRATEGY:** Support the weak arm on a flat surface at shoulder height to lift the weak hand behind the head.

## TIPS

- Long handled brush or comb



- Long handled sponge



- Hand-held shower head



- Universal cuffs, built up handles and long handles can be used to adapt any personal care items such as deodorants, shavers, brushes and combs



# Personal care

**KEY STRATEGY:** Adaptations to keep the objects in the weaker hand steady when grooming and washing the stronger arm and underarm.

## TIPS

- A clipper can be nailed or glued to a board and secured at the edge of a table
- Electric shavers are generally heavier and weigh more. These are safer for teens who have a weak grasp



- A manual shaver can be adapted with a long handle and held with a universal cuff if the child's grasp is very weak

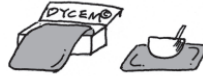


# Meal preparation and cooking

**KEY STRATEGY:** Adaptations to keep objects steady if the weak arm cannot hold the object steady on the table.

## TIPS

- Anti-slip mats Rubbermaid®, Dycem® (objects will not slide with mat underneath)



- One handed bread holder (wall at the edge of the board will stop bread from sliding)



- One handed cutting board (spikes are used to hold round objects in place while cutting)



- Bagel cutter



- One handed can or jar opener



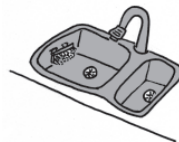
- Universal cuffs (a utensil is put inside the pocket and cuff is secured around the hand)



- Built-up handles and adapted utensils (a thicker handle allows for a stronger grip)



- Suction brushes (the brush is suctioned to the bottom of the sink to scrub dishes)



# School activities

## Playground and classroom activities

**KEY STRATEGY:** Encourage the child to take part in all activities of interest.

The child should be encouraged to take part in all school activities. Activities such as climbing, and playing on the monkey bars can be difficult for a child with OBPP and the child might need to be supervised. Your occupational therapist and physical therapist will tell you what is best for the child.

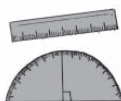
## In the classroom

The child's OBPP condition may cause weakness in his or her hand. He or she may need extra time at first to finish classwork such as cutting, arts and crafts and computer work. With practice, your child will learn to adapt and become good at these skills.

It is important to allow them to develop and practice the strategies in this booklet.

### TIPS

- Ask the teacher to give the child a lower locker at school. If a full sized locker is used, hang a canvas bag from the back hook to store notebooks and school supplies
- Use an adapted keyboard or learn to type with a one handed typing program
- Use a clipboard with Anti-slip mats (i.e. Rubbermaid®, Dycem®) underneath to keep the paper from moving for writing or colouring
- Use a ruler or protractor with cork or anti-slip material underneath



# Leisure activities

## Sports, arts and hobbies

**KEY STRATEGY:** The sky's the limit! Encourage your child to try all activities of interest!

Encourage your child to participate in the activities they are interested in. Most activities can be adapted to suit the needs of the child with OBPP. Your local prosthetic facility can make adaptive devices for sports and recreational activities. A prosthetic facility makes artificial limbs and special equipment for people with limb differences. These include adaptations for baseball gloves, golf clubs, piano and guitar. Your occupational therapist will tell you what is best for the child.

### EXAMPLES OF ADAPTIVE EQUIPMENT

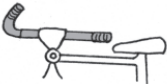
- Adapted baseball glove



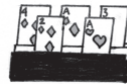
- One handed recorder



- Adapted bike handles



- Other activities





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