

**Disclaimer: Activities with children must always be risk assessed, including for allergies or choking. Children must always have adequate supervision. Resources and materials must always be appropriate for children's age and stage of development.**

## Activity: straws and oral motor development

**Oral motor development refers to the coordination and strength of the muscles in the mouth and face that are essential for speaking, eating and swallowing.**

Tongues, lips, cheeks and jaws are tied to a whole host of muscles, and as with all muscles, they can be strong, weak, coordinated or uncoordinated. Here is an activity to help support children's oral motor development.

### Learning aims

- Oral motor strength – strengthens muscles in the mouth and jaw through sucking, blowing and controlling airflow
- Coordination and control by practising precise movements such as sucking, blowing and manipulating the straw.



### Resources

- Paper or reusable straws
- Small cups or containers (enough for 2 each)
- Water in a large jug, dispenser or container (food colouring – optional).

### Activity outline

- Set up the straw station with the containers, water and straws
- Explain to the children that they are going to do some activities with a straw that will involve sucking and blowing. Demonstrate the action of sucking and blowing with your mouth and breath at this point and ask them to copy you. See if they can feel the air on their hand when they blow down the straw
- Ask children to choose 2 containers and a straw
- Pour some water into one of their cups or containers
- Model what you would like them to do. The ultimate aim is for the children to suck up water through the straw, hold it in their mouths and transfer the water to their other container. However, start with simply sucking up the water as some children will need to practise using a straw (some may choose to remain doing this part of the activity repeatedly). Some children may cough because the

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water has been ingested quickly, however, if this happens repeatedly, switch to a thicker liquid, such as a smoothie, which will help while they practise sucking up through a straw

- Next, for those who are ready, ask them to suck up the water and hold it in their mouths for 3-5 seconds. Count out the seconds
- Finally, suggest that they suck up some water, hold it for a few seconds in their mouths and then release the water, down the straw, into their other container. You could challenge the children to see if they can manage to transfer all the water from the straw to the container without dribbling or swallowing any
- Try placing the empty cup or container further away so that children have to negotiate walking and holding the straw filled water to add further challenge to their oral muscles.

### Extension ideas:

- Place cotton wool, leaves or other small, light items on to a surface for children to blow to a specific destination, e.g. across a table, tray or through a maze
- Blow bubbles with different sized straws or use bubble wands with soapy water.

### NDNA products to support you with this activity:

- Online course - [Speech and language skills](#)