

# Playdough: It's Goopy, Fun, and Educational

Winter is a season when children spend more time indoors, but that doesn't mean that there aren't plenty of things to do that are both fun and educational. Few materials are as appealing to young children as playdough. Children enjoy playing with gooey things, and at the same time these materials can be highly educational because they meet children's needs in four areas of development:



physical, cognitive, emotional, and social.

**Physical Development:** When children squeeze and mold playdough and other gooey materials, they are also working to develop their small muscles which they will later use for holding pencils and pens, turning pages in a book, or pressing the keys on a computer.

**Cognitive Development:** Children who watch the changes in forms produced by rolling, dripping, squeezing, or pounding

gooey materials begin to understand chemistry and physics – some of the principles of how our world works. In talking about their play, they get to practice words as they describe their experiences.

**Emotional Development:** For many children, playing with gooey things can be a calming activity: it feels great to a young child to sense the coolness or smoothness of these materials and to have adult permission to play with



something "nicely messy." Also, it's a relief to young children simply to be able to play (enjoy the process!) and not to have to always make something (end up with a product!).

**Social Development:** As children play with gooey things, they engage each other in conversation and get to practice sharing their excitement. "Look at my playdough! It looks like an apple pie!" or "You can sit next to me: I'm squeezing my playdough out as long as yours!"

The combination of fun and educational values make playdough a terrific indoor activity for young children in the wintertime (or for that matter, any time of year).



- Mary Ucci, Educational Director of the Child Study Center of Wellesley College.  
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Playdough and other similar materials are widely available in stores, but here are a couple of recipes that can save money:

**Playdough Recipe:**

- 2 cups of flour
- 2 cups water
- 1/2 cup salt
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon cream of tartar
- food color (optional)

Mix all ingredients together in a heavy saucepan until all lumps are gone. Heat mixture over medium-high burner, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon. Mixture will begin to thicken and form big lumps. Stir like crazy! When mixture is as clumped as you can get it and it resembles "wet" scrambled eggs, it is

done. Dump warm mixture out onto clean surface (Formica is good). Allow to cool a bit while you clean the pot and spoon. Then begin to knead the playdough. **DO NOT ADD FLOUR!** Have faith - the playdough will become less sticky as it cools while you knead it. Thoroughly cool before storing in airtight container.

**"Oobleck" Recipe:**

- 1 1/2 cups corn starch
- 1 cup water
- food color (optional)

Mix the ingredients and allow children to play with the mixture. When "pushed" together, the mixture will appear dry and solid; as children let go of the mixture, it flows like a smooth liquid.