



Feeding Skills

Progression of Foods

Good news! Parents can make important positive differences when it comes to a child and eating. You are the most important person in your child's world!

What should meal time feel like? Think of a time when you had an enjoyable meal. What feelings did you have? Meal times aren't just about nutrition and refueling. They offer us a time to *socialize* and have *fun*. They also offer us *rest*-- who doesn't look forward to lunch as a break in the middle of the day? They offer us *independence* in making choices: what to eat, where, and what else to do. Your child enjoys the same feelings! *Meal times should be calm and enjoyable. They should be fun and stress-free.*



This child can see the spoon coming toward his mouth, which prepares him to accept the food more easily.

About the progression of foods and feeding skills

The following table is a roadmap to the kinds of foods your child will enjoy as his or her feeding skills develop. Also included is a brief guide to positioning your child, and tips for interacting with your child at each mealtime. Find additional information on each subject here:

Safe and appropriate foods. The progression of foods column considers different characteristics of foods. These characteristics include whether it is thin or thick (example: milk versus a yogurt drink), whether it is difficult to swallow (wet foods versus dry foods requiring saliva production), the texture of the food (such as smooth, lumpy, crunchy, dry, and mixed solids and liquids such as fruit cocktail).

Your child's skills. Your feeding therapist can tell you what feeding skills your child has and what skills your child needs to develop next.

The right position. Some children may need extra physical stability to do their best work in feeding. Talk to your therapist about how to best support and position your child.



You can help. Here are some tips on what you can do to facilitate your child's success in eating: *Choose the environment:* If your child is easily distracted, choose a room to eat in with less visual distractions, less noise, and that is smaller to help her concentrate. *Use positive cues:* Your child may better understand the nonverbal cues of your facial expression, tone of voice, and posture rather than the words you're saying! You can reduce stress at mealtime by staying calm and using positive, clear cues. Try to interact with him in a loving, supportive way. Make eye contact and smile! *Setting a boundary:* When you have to set a limit on his behavior, be firm but gentle. Use simple words or gestures that tell him what he is supposed to do. Try to be as consistent as you can when setting the boundary so he learns quicker.

Please talk with your feeding therapist to determine what foods, positioning, and interaction tips are the best for you and your child.

Progression of safe and appropriate foods	Your child's skills	The right position	You can help!
<p>Liquids. Examples: Breast milk, formula, water, juice.</p>	<p>Sucking, swallowing</p>	<p>Semi-reclined on his back at about 45 degrees.</p>	<p>Close face-to-face interaction during feedings helps establish a bond at feeding time.</p> <p>When setting the pace in feeding, consider the cues your child sends in his facial expressions and body language.</p>
<p>Foods that would be safe to swallowed without chewing.</p> <p>Examples: Pureed foods, strained foods, oatmeal</p>	<p>Munching (simple up-and-down biting)</p>	<p>Sits in an infant seat or well supported in high chair with seat belt or tray to prevent falling forward or sideways.</p>	
<p>Mashed and soft foods (foods that are safely swallowed with no chewing, but allow an opportunity to chew).</p> <p>Examples: Well mashed, cooked vegetables; soft, diced fruit; yogurt.</p>	<p>Munching and learning to chew</p>	<p>Sits supported in high chair with seat belt or tray to prevent falling forward.</p>	<p>Be at eye level with your child when feeding her. She will better see your non-verbal cues during feeding.</p> <p>If you are feeding her, prepare her to accept food by showing her the spoon, fork or cup before you bring it to her mouth.</p>
<p>Foods requiring some chewing.</p> <p>Examples: Lightly toasted bread, biscuits, cheese, soft cookies (quickly dissolves)</p>	<p>Uses fingers to feed self</p>	<p>Sits independently in high chair with seat belt or tray to prevent falling forward.</p>	<p>Hold the spoon or cup near her mouth and let her take a sip or bite of the food on her own, if possible. This allows her to be more active in the feeding process.</p>
<p>Bite sized food requiring chewing.</p> <p>Examples: cooked or canned vegetables, soft raw fruits, mashed potatoes, noodles, soft cooked meat, tofu.</p>	<p>Chewing, learning to grind food between molars (beginning circular jaw movements)</p>	<p>Sits well in chair with hips at 90 degrees; needs no additional support.</p>	
<p>Table foods that are easy to chew.</p> <p>Examples: Cubed soft fruit, cooked vegetables, soft cheeses, cooked meats, crackers</p>	<p>Rotary chewing; exploration in holding and using spoon, fork, cup; may play with utensils</p>	<p>Sits well unsupported.</p>	
	<p>Efficient finger feeding. Beginning to feed self with spoon and open cup</p>	<p>Sits well unsupported; may use high chair, booster seat, or child sized chair and table.</p>	<p>Sit near your child at snack or mealtime and offer help only if he needs it. This helps him become more independent in eating.</p>
<p>More complex foods such as those with liquids mixed with solids.</p> <p>Examples: Apples (peeled), fruit cocktail, soups.</p>	<p>Child manages most foods well. Child may be messy while learning to feed self with spoon, fork, and cup.</p>	<p>Sits well unsupported; may use booster seat or child sized chair and table.</p>	