

Encouraging Feeding skills

Experts say that the age of a child and the **amount of exposure to oral feeding experiences** is very important. It may affect success with moving your child to oral feeding in the future.

Oral feeding skills are **learned** and require **repetition and practice**. Children who do not get a chance to feed orally, may have difficulty developing the skills needed. Give your baby opportunities to have some food orally if it is safe to do so. A routine for meals is helpful as your baby gets older. Your Speech-Language Therapist will be able to support you with this.

If your Speech-Language Therapist has said that your child is not safe for oral feeding, use an appropriate non-food item. For example, a pacifier, teething/mouthing toy, parent's/carer's fingers- please see pictures below:

Ideas to help your family with mouth play for your tube fed child: Do these before a tube feed when your child is awake and settled for 3-5 minutes then continue through the tube feed.

Make sure you and your baby are comfortable. Hold your baby close either lying on their side against you or facing you. Skin to skin contact will help calm your baby. Make sure your baby is comfortable and relaxed, no frowning or grimacing.

Infants –under 6 months

- ✓ Do lots of kissing and stroking of the face leading down to the mouth.



- ✓ Encourage non-nutritive sucking with a pacifier or on your finger.



- ✓ Stroke and touch your baby's lips, tongue, cheeks and jaw to get them used to your touch then you can use an empty teat or finger toothbrush to get them used to different sensations. Use soft toys as well.
- ✓ Encourage nutritive sucking with therapeutic tastes by dipping your baby's pacifier in expressed breast milk or formula, **(please check with your Speech-Language Therapist or medical professional)**.

- ✓ This is the time to get your baby used to being active during feeds and engaging their oral structure (lips, tongue, cheek, mouth and jaw) throughout the feeding process.
- ✓ Stop if your baby shows signs of distress – e.g. gagging, pulling away, changes in breathing.

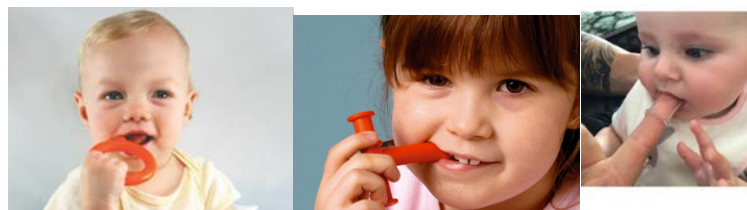


Infants- 6 months or over

- ✓ Ensure your baby is well supported and positioned either on a chair or other seating system. They can also be supported in your arms and body as well.
- ✓ Use mouthing/teething toys and place on the outer face first, i.e. lips, cheek, upper and lower face. Then progress inside the mouth first touching the tongue and gums as tolerated.



- ✓ Use a non-food item that is stick shaped and move it side to side on the lips then the front gums and then to the back gums. This encourages the tongue to move laterally (side to side) and is an early chewing skill, which is very important to encourage at this age. Stop if baby shows any signs of distress such as gagging, coughing, changes in breathing or pulling away.



- ✓ Encourage general mouthing of toys and objects. Assist your child though hand over hand to help interact with a spoon, cup or toy.

- ✓ Stick shapes toys and foods best to encourage chewing skills, e.g. baby rusks, toast fingers, dissolvable potato sticks, hard raw vegetables and fruits (carrot, celery, apple sticks), biltong, ginger nut biscuits, (foods that don't break off easily). Check with your Speech Language Therapist before introducing food items. Some of these food items may not be appropriate if your baby has teeth and could bite a piece off.



- ✓ Using food is more effective but non-food items (e.g. toys, empty spoons and cups) will also work, if your child cannot have foods yet.
- ✓ Wrapping or putting food in muslin, organza pouches and/or silicone or gauze feeders are safe ways to help your child try harder to chew foods.



- ✓ It is just as important for your child to be participating at your mealtimes. Tube feed at the table while the family is having dinner.
- ✓ Your baby will learn by watching you eating and drinking, modelling of eating and interactions at mealtimes.

Don't hesitate to get in touch with your Speech-Language Therapist or feeding team if you have any questions.