

Feeding Therapy for Infants & Toddlers

What is Feeding Therapy?

When a baby struggles to bottle-feed, breastfeed, transition to solids, or transition off a feeding tube, feeding therapy can help. Specially trained speech therapists, occupational therapists, and lactation professionals are essential to the early detection and treatment of feeding and swallowing difficulties. Identifying and treating these difficulties early improves the long-term health, development, and well-being of babies and toddlers struggling to eat.

How does Feeding Therapy help?

Feeding therapists evaluate a baby's or toddler's anatomy, physiology, feeding, and swallowing skills and then create an individualized treatment plan to improve the child's feeding. They help with: **breastfeeding** (deeper latch, increased milk transfer, etc), **bottle feeding** (sucking, swallowing, enjoying taking a bottle, etc.), **transitioning to solids** (chewing, swallowing, accepting and enjoying new foods, etc.), **tube feeding** (eliminating oral aversion, breast or bottle feeding, chewing, swallowing, enjoying new foods, etc.), **tongue and lip tie** (suck training, pre- and post-revision exercises, etc.). Feeding therapy repairs trust and can strengthen the relationship between the caregiver and the child.

Who needs Feeding Therapy?

Babies and toddlers with the following may need therapy:

Tongue and/or lip tie	Down Syndrome
Breast/bottle aversion	Autism or sensory issues
Premature or low birth weight	Weakness in the face or neck
Feeding tube	Respiratory Issues
Cleft lip and palate	Cardiac Issues
Dysphagia (difficulties swallowing)	Food allergies
GERD or acid reflux	Hypo- or hypertonia

Signs & symptoms indicating a feeding evaluation may be needed...

By 8 months cannot:

- Open their mouth when offered food or a spoon
- Eat a meal without pushing food out with their tongue
- Use hands to bring food to their mouth

By 12 months cannot:

- Eat foods other than purees
- Use their lips to remove food from a spoon
- Chew and swallow soft table foods
- Take sips from a cup or straw

Accept and enjoy a variety of age-appropriate foods

At any age:

Consistently eating best when asleep or mostly asleep

Not letting you know when they are hungry

Not letting you know when they are full

Labored breathing with and without feeding

Poor growth or weight gain

Coughing or gagging during or after eating

Difficult or stressful to feed

Eating for less than five minutes or more than 30 minutes

Distressed when eating (crying, whining, back arching, head turning, etc)

Requiring special equipment, strategies, or distractions to eat

Difficulty coordinating sucking, swallowing, and breathing

Difficulty coordinating chewing, swallowing, and breathing