

Feeding Therapy

What is Feeding Therapy

Feeding therapy helps children who are unable or unwilling to participate in mealtimes and/or easily eat a balanced diet that promotes healthy growth. It addresses all the different areas that can make mealtime a struggle, some examples include; **feeding skill** (coughing, choking, gagging, excessively long or short mealtimes, difficulty chewing and swallowing, etc), **psychosocial** (refusing to eat, unable to sit and eat with the family, needing a distraction to eat, etc), **sensory** (refusing to try new foods, refusing all foods from one or more of the food groups), **medical** (not showing signs of hunger, vomiting, etc), **nutrition** (eating a limited diet, insufficient growth, etc.). Feeding therapists work with the medical team to determine if medical issues are affecting the child's ability to eat, they evaluate the child's feeding and swallowing skills, and then establish a treatment plan based on the child's individual needs. Most importantly, they train and empower parents to address the child's feeding challenges in their own home.

Who Provides Feeding Therapy?

Feeding therapy can be provided by several different disciplines based on the underlying difficulties causing the feeding difficulties. Most often feeding therapists are speech language pathologists (SLP) or occupational therapists (OT). They assess and treat swallowing disorders, oral motor dysfunction, difficult mealtime behaviors, and/or sensory issues related to eating and drinking. Identifying and treating feeding and swallowing difficulties early improves the long-term health, development, and well-being of children struggling to eat.

Who needs Feeding Therapy?

Children with the following may need therapy:

Autism	Breast or bottle feeding difficulties
Cerebral Palsy	Swallowing phobias
Down Syndrome	Mealtime difficulties and tantrums
Sensory Processing Disorder	Limited intake of foods
Dysphagia (swallowing difficulties)	Sensitivities with food textures
Feeding tube	Limited dietary diversity
Cleft lip and/or palate	Food aversions
Tongue and/or Lip Tie	Oral Motor delays

A feeding Evaluation may be needed if...

By 8 months cannot:

- Easily eat/drink when fully awake

- Open mouth when presented with food or milk
- Eat a meal without frequently pushing food out with their tongue
- Use hands to bring food and toys to their mouth

By 12 months cannot:

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

By 2 years cannot:

- Easily eat a variety of table foods
- Effectively chew difficult foods like meat or raw vegetables
- Keep lips closed while chewing

Generally:

- Complains that eating or drinking is painful
- Difficulty chewing age appropriate foods
- Screams/cries when 'new' foods are offered
- Avoids or refuses certain food groups
- Has aversions to the texture, taste, or smell of certain foods
- Unable to come or stay at the table for meals
- Poor growth or weight gain
- Coughing or gagging during or after eating
- Never seems hungry
- Eating for less than five minutes or more than 30 minutes
- Child and/ or caregiver stress, fear, or worry during mealtime
- Requiring special equipment, strategies, or distractions to eat

