

## Eating and drinking

Being able to manage to eat and drink independently and neatly is an important aspect of social acceptance.

There are common issues affecting eating and drinking include issues with oral motor control such as chewing and swallowing that require specialist assessment. This leaflet deals with the practical problems of managing eating and drinking, using utensils and independence during mealtimes.



Again when teaching skills assess and follow the developmental sequence in which children usually acquire these skills.

### Positioning

It is important that the child is seated on a suitable chair, at a table that is of an appropriate height. Correct positioning will aid the child to be more functional with their arms.

Give the child praise and consider making the activity more difficult in small steps.

### Learning to drink from a cup

- ensure the child is sat securely, use small short plastic cups that are easy to hold and don't require child to tilt head back, fill cup up and give support to child in tilting the cup
- sometimes thicker drinks are easier to learn to sip such as milk shakes or smoothies
- once the child is ready to learn to hold the cup fill the cup part of the way, use small cups or cups with handles
- teaching children to hold a cup with one hand provide a narrow cup that is easy to grasp or has one handle or with a weighted bottom.

### Finger feeding

Offer bite sized foods with one finger food at each meal.

- offer only a few pieces at a time
- if child has difficulty picking up pieces then hand the pieces into the child's fingers individually.

### Learning to use a spoon

Initially give opportunities to play with a spoon during feeding

- when ready to try using a spoon be prepared for a mess, give opportunities to use spoons during play in the sand pit, with pot and pans with eg raisins, dried pasta so child can practice stirring and loading the spoon and putting in/out of pots or onto plates or in pretend play feeding dolly
- initially you can try handing a loaded spoon to the child to take to his mouth.
- when learning to load the spoon use food that is more likely to stick onto the spoon such as mashed potatoes, yoghurt or rice pudding.
- if the child has difficulties grasping the spoon then try large or shaped handles or a handle with straps to hold hand in place.



- use bowls with high sides or in a pot such as yoghurt to assist with loading.
- use hand over hand to help child learn scooping action
- practice at the beginning of the meal when child most hungry and more motivated
- if child loses concentration/interest easily, have the spoon yourself and alternate child feeding self with giving a spoonful to keep meal moving along
- use a plastic bowl
- a suction bottom or Dycem™ under the bowl will help keep the bowl in position and stop from slipping
- try the hand-over-hand technique, placing your hands over the child's throughout feeding.



#### Learning to use a fork

- if there is a problem with holding the fork use adapted cutlery. Your therapist can advise you on different handles and grips
- once the child has mastered using a spoon, they can progress to learning how to use a fork
- begin using a plastic bowl, then progress to using a plate
- a suction bottom or dycem under the bowl will help keep the bowl in position and stop from slipping
- use foods that are easier to stab and can be cut into larger pieces eg chicken, sausages etc
- avoid foods that will fall apart when stabbed such as boiled potatoes.

#### Learning to use a knife

- in play give opportunities to use plastic knives to cut eg play doh or plastacine, and toys from the Early Learning Centre such as Velcro together piece of fruit, sandwich sets
- let the child help with simple food preparation using a knife, eg cut up a banana for a fruit salad
- initially start with soft foods that child can push knife through, such as boiled potatoes
- move on to teaching to cut foods that require a sawing action, such as soft meats
- using a knife and fork together is a complex skill as each hand does a different action but must co-ordinate together. Emphasise the different actions of each hand the fork to hold food still and the knife to cut through and practice using slices of bread
- remind the child to keep cutlery in their hands as if they put cutlery down then they will be more likely to use their fingers
- the child also needs to learn to move the food using their cutlery into position on the plate so it is in the easiest position to cut. This again is best practised and explained initially using something such as a slice of bread, then helped and shown how during the mealtime
- use a serrated knife for cutting foods
- use an unserrated knife for spreading food such as butter and jam on bread.



#### Tips to minimize food play

- give opportunities to engage in messy play outside meal times
- allow some opportunities to touch and explore food

- if the child starts throwing or dumping food, calmly remove and start feeding the child yourself. If the child has eaten a sufficient amount, finish the meal
- let child help clean up after meal times and give a flannel to clean face.

#### Learning table manners

- encourage to use a napkin to wipe face
- comment on children during mealtimes who are eating nicely
- let children be involved in the whole mealtime process, with help as necessary, such as laying the table, serving themselves, clearing up, pouring a drink, wiping the table etc.

#### Keeping the plate still

- use non slip Dycem™ mat to prevent plate slipping
- a plate or bowl with a lip makes scooping easier.

#### Carrying lunch tray

- buddy system – an allocated friend to help
- tray with handles
- purchase adapted tray with one handle and non-slip surface
- have table allocated short distance from collection point.

