

HELPING CHILDREN WITH EATING & DRINKING

Children can have difficulty with this skill for various reasons. However, from a sensory perspective it could be due to an over responsiveness to touch, smell or taste; under responsiveness to sensory input and having little awareness of their mouth and how to move their tongue and jaw to manipulate food or it could be that the child has a strong need for movement that they struggle to sit long enough to eat the meal.

SENSORY STRATEGIES:

- Minimise overwhelming auditory (hearing) and visual stimulus.
- If your child is sensitive to unexpected touch from others seat at the end of the table.
- Be aware of the texture, mix of textures and temperature of foods. A portioned plate can be helpful for children who like their foods separate.
- Allow children to play and explore their foods; this will allow them to experience different textures through the tactile system. Due to their oral hypersensitivity, they will feel "safer" exploring textures with their hands first, rather than their mouths.
- Some children who are sensitive in the mouth benefit from cleaning out their mouths with water between mouthfuls.
- For children who seek movement introduce a movement activity prior to sitting e.g. bouncing on a ball, parents lap. Movement breaks may be necessary for the very active child.
- Deep touch applied through the face/head/shoulders may help your child sit longer: Use your index and middle fingers together to provide deep pressure touch to child's face, following the direction of hair growth, starting at their midline and working outwards-
 - bridge of nose to cheeks
 - under nose to cheeks
 - under chin to jaw
 - forehead to side of head
- If your child is a messy eater, provide pressure around the lips and mouth prior to eating and encourage an oral motor activity prior to eating. A small mirror on the table could also be used to help with accuracy in placing food in mouth and cleaning up after each bite.
- Children who are over responsive to food textures will also benefit from doing oral motor activities outside of eating times to desensitize the mouth (see activity list below).



Bowl of Bubbles Fill a large bowl about half full of water. Add a few squirts of dishwashing liquid. A few drops of food colouring may be added too. Give the child a straw, preferably a curly, crazy straw and encourage them to blow into the water. The child should keep blowing until the bubbles spill over the rim of the bowl. This is a fun activity to do with two children. Small plastic animals can be placed at the bottom of the bowl and the children can time how long it takes until the animals are completely hidden.



Party Blower Targets

Set up small animal figures on building blocks or cubes made of Lego. Ask the child to lie on their stomach in front of the figures. Using a large party blower (the ones that curl up and make a sound); the child can pretend to be a lizard or frog with a long tongue and knock down the figures. Lying on their stomach helps the child to regulate them and it is beneficial for proprioceptive feedback (see sensory integration). Other items can be used for the same game such as cut out cardboard figures.



Blow Pen Art

Blow pens are a good way to be creative whilst benefitting from a blowing activity. Pens are available from a variety of places in a variety of colours. Encourage the child to breathe deeply before blowing and watch that they don't become light headed. The activity should be stopped if they become light headed and tired again another day



Good Vibrations

Vibration in and around the mouth will provide extra sensory feedback which will in turn help to balance the tactile responses. Use a tool like the Z Vibe or electric/battery toothbrush. This helps by de-sensitising an over sensitive mouth (use on low and slow vibration), or by stimulating an under sensitive mouth (using fast, high vibration).

GENERAL STRATEGIES:

- Encourage a good sitting posture with feet on floor or supported on a stool/box.
- Cutlery with chunkier handles or Caring Cutlery will be easier to hold or cutlery with favourite characters/toys may encourage motivation.
- Include your child in the preparation of food, touching food-opening packages; let your child touch and smell new food without any expectation of tasting it.
- Try providing distractions while they are eating.
- Provide choice of two new foods to try. Let him know he only needs to eat one bite to see if he likes it. Find out the best time of day for your child to try something new... breakfast, lunch, snack, or dinner. When is he most agreeable, hungry, willing, awake.
- Focus on praise, not punishment.

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