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**Chapter 2**

# **Feeding**

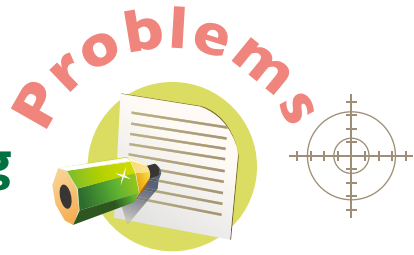


## **Feeding Skill** *Development*

Children are born with the ability to suckle and swallow liquid food. At six months old, children will begin to develop the ability to chew. Through practices in daily routines, at around five years old, children will be able to use different utensils to eat various kinds of food and handle different types of food packaging. To understand more about children's feeding skill development, parents can refer to the following table:

<b>Age</b>	<b>Feeding Skills</b>
0-3 months old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink liquid from milk bottle</li> <li>• Swallow liquid food</li> </ul>
3-6 months old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Swallow mushy food, such as soft rice cereal and soft fruit puree</li> </ul>
6-12 months old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Swallow sticky food, such as porridge and potato puree</li> <li>• Chew crispy solid food</li> <li>• Hold milk bottle with both hands while feeding</li> <li>• Sip liquid from spoon</li> </ul>
1-2 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chew soft solid food</li> <li>• Use fingers to put food into mouth</li> <li>• Drink from a straw</li> </ul>
2-3 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink with cup without spilling</li> <li>• Pick food up with toothpick</li> <li>• Pick food up with fork</li> </ul>
3-4 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat hard and tough solid food</li> <li>• Eat with spoon</li> <li>• Drink soup with a spoon without spilling</li> <li>• Transfer food into mouth with chopsticks</li> <li>• Spit out seeds or bones in food</li> <li>• Handle carton drink without spilling</li> </ul>
4-5 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pick food up with chopsticks</li> <li>• Spread butter or jam on a slice of bread with knife</li> <li>• Use hands to eat chicken wings</li> <li>• Pour drink out from small water bottle without spilling</li> <li>• Tear off food packaging</li> </ul>
5-6 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open sealed food packaging, such as cup jelly</li> <li>• Open canned drinks without spilling</li> </ul>

# Common Feeding



When children eat, the following problems may occur, which can be challenging to parents. Does your child have any of these problems?

- ( ) Picky with food, will only eat food of certain taste, temperature, colour or texture.
- ( ) Resists unfamiliar food.
- ( ) Insists on using certain utensils or tableware.
- ( ) Does not like to chew food and would try to force it down by swallowing.
- ( ) Easy to choke on food, even to the extent of vomiting.
- ( ) Food remains can often be found inside the mouth.
- ( ) Unable to spit out the seeds or bones in food.
- ( ) Inappropriate handling of utensils.
- ( ) Clumsy handling of utensils.
- ( ) Likes to walk around while eating and cannot remain seated.
- ( ) Shows lack of appetite and eats slowly.
- ( ) Refuses to self-feed and relies on parents' assistance.

# Causes of Feeding Problems

Children with feeding problems are often affected by individual developmental factors or external environmental factors. Take a look and see if your child is affected by any of the following factors:

## Individual Developmental Factors

### **Hypersensitive to sensory stimuli / weak sensory discrimination**

- ( ) Hypersensitive to touch and temperature change at the mouth and lips; can only accept food of certain texture or temperature.
- ( ) Hypersensitive to smell and taste; can only accept certain flavours and tastes.
- ( ) Hypersensitive to sound. In extreme cases, avoid chewing so as to prevent hearing the sounds created in the chewing process.
- ( ) Weak sensory discrimination at the mouth; unable to identify the location of the food inside the mouth.

### **Weak oral muscles**

- ( ) Unable to coordinate the movement of swallowing food.
- ( ) Unable to coordinate the movement of chewing food.
- ( ) Unable to coordinate the movement of drinking.
- ( ) Unable to coordinate the movement of spitting out seeds or bones in food.



### **Inadequate fine motor skills**

- ( ) Unable to coordinate hand movements to use utensils, e.g. holding bowl in one hand while using the other to scoop rice with spoon or use chopsticks to pick up food.

### **Inadequate cognitive skills**

- ( ) Unable to master the methods and procedures in using different utensils.
- ( ) Unable to display the required social behaviours while eating.

### **Lack of flexibility**

- ( ) Insists on current eating habits, e.g. only uses a fixed set of tableware or only eating familiar food.
- ( ) Shows strong preference or dislike for a particular colour or type of food.

## **External Environmental Factors**

### **Inappropriate preparation of food and arrangement of utensils**

- ( ) Food combination and cooking methods are too simple and not attractive.
- ( ) Food is presented in large chunks, making it hard to eat.
- ( ) Food is too hard or tough, making it difficult to eat.
- ( ) Food is too bland, strong or spicy in flavour.
- ( ) Utensil designs are too sophisticated, handles are too big or small, making them hard to use.

### **Inappropriate meal timing, environment and portion**

- ( ) Meals taken too frequently or irregularly; the time between meals is too short or too long.
- ( ) The eating environment is too noisy or distracting, e.g. watching television and eating at the same time.
- ( ) The meal portion is too big or too small.

### **Inappropriate attitude of adults**

- ( ) Overprotective of the child. As a result, the child lacks the awareness and skills to eat independently.
- ( ) Too accommodating to the child. As a result, the child fails to display proper social behaviours while eating.
- ( ) Lack of positive encouragements and rewards; constantly put pressure on the child by being overly demanding of the child or speaking in an oppressive tone.
- ( ) The adults are unable to set a good example for the child to follow.

# Tips on Feeding Skill



# Training

To deal with children’s feeding problems, parents must understand the factors affecting the children and master the appropriate and effective training methods. In general, parents need to improve their children’s feeding skills systematically and arrange appropriate food, utensils, meal timing and environment in order to help children gradually establish an independent feeding habit. The following are some common problems parents may face when conducting feeding training for their children. Are you facing the same problems? If so, you can refer to the following **Tips** provided by occupational therapists.



**My baby is already nine months old and begins to eat solid food. What type of food should I choose?**

### Tips

When selecting food types, parents should consider the age of the children and their development in chewing and swallowing. In general, children will be able to eat harder and larger food as they grow.

For example:

Age	Food Type	Examples
3-6 months old	Mushy food	Soft rice cereal, soft fruit puree
6-12 months old	Sticky food Crispy solid food	Congee, potato puree Corn flakes, small biscuits
1-2 years old	Soft solid food	Soft rice, cake
2-3 years old	Hard solid food	Thick fruit slices, biscuits
3-4 years old	Hard and tough solid food	Meat, dried fruits

As the stage of development in chewing and swallowing differs for each child, parents should pay close attention to their children's performance while feeding them. If a child frequently chokes on food, the child's oral motor functions may not be fully developed for chewing.

If a child is unable to handle the food types listed in the table according to the child's age group for a long period of time, parents should consult their family doctor without delay.