

Helping Your Child Develop Feeding Skills

Listed below are suggestions for incorporating feeding skills into daily routines:

Practicing with Containers

- Let your child practice taking tops off of different kinds of containers. Put some favorite toys in plastic boxes or jars. If he has difficulty, allow him to finish opening the containers. Gradually close the lids on the containers more and more. Finally let him try to lift the lids without assistance.
- Let your child try to remove the pull-tab tops on containers such as pudding or gelatin. Initially, pull the lid part-way off. Gradually let her do more and more of the task.
- Save bottles when you empty them. Lay out a group of empty bottles on the table. Put the lids in a separate pile. Let your child find the correct lids for the bottles and put them on. You can have a race to see who can finish putting tops on the most bottles.
- Let your child practice pouring while engaging in water play. Put a variety of cups and containers in the water bin and show her how to fill it up and pour it out. Provide several types and sizes of containers.

Practicing with Eating and Drinking Utensils

- Encourage your child to feed himself by helping with hand-over-hand as you scoop. Start easing your grip until he/she is scooping all by himself/herself.
- Encourage your child to practice drinking from a straw and sip-cup. Put small amounts of liquid in the cup to start. Use a small cup that has a wide steady base. Expect some spills but realize that the effort to develop independence is important, even if additional time is needed.
- Incorporate skills such as hand-washing before meals and snacks and cleaning up afterwards into feeding routines.



Key Points – Time – Practice – Encouragement

When building independent feeding skills it is important to remember the typical developmental stages of self-feeding. The development of motor coordination is important to the ability to manipulate and use utensils. Encourage your child to practice feeding himself, beginning with finger foods and progressing to spoon and fork.

Give your child plenty of time to practice and let her be as independent as possible during mealtimes. Sometimes young children are “picky”. Begin your teaching of self-feeding skills when your child is eating a preferred food.

Give him the tools he needs to be successful. Consider bowls that attach to the table, child-sized utensils and small cups with handles and spouts.

Encourage your child to try for themselves but provide help and encouragement when needed so she doesn't get frustrated.

If your child seems to have considerable difficulties with using utensils, chewing, swallowing, and/or tolerating certain foods consult your pediatrician.

Your child's safety is your priority. Even though the goal is to help develop independence, supervision and monitoring are essential during feeding routines.