

Theraplay, Inc.

Normal Feeding Skill Development in the First 18 Months



Many parents are concerned about their child's feeding skills and question what is normal and what should be a concern. There are so many feeding products on the market today, as well as a variety of baby foods on the shelves, that parents today are simply overwhelmed. This information is meant to serve as a guideline to the normal stages of feeding skill development within the first 18 months of a child's life, in an effort to help caregivers better understand feeding milestones.

Birth – 3 months: Child demonstrates a strong rooting and gag reflex. Baby takes 2-6 ounces of liquid per feeding, feeding 6 or more times a day. Your baby will use a suckling or sucking pattern, and the tongue may protrude slightly through the lips. The baby typically takes 2 or more sucks from the breast or bottle before pausing to breathe or swallow.

3 – 4 months: The infant should be fed in a supported semi-sitting position, reclining at a 45-90 degree angle. Baby takes 7-8 ounces of liquid per feeding, feeding 4-6 times a day. Your baby can suck soft or pureed foods from a spoon, but does not use the upper lip to assist in removal of food from the spoon.

4 – 6 months: Cereals, pureed foods, and cup drinking should be introduced. Baby now takes 9-10 ounces of food/liquid per feeding, feeding 4-6 times per day. Your baby should start self-feeding with finger foods and begin using a munching chew pattern. Baby should hold the bottle most of the time.

7 – 8 months: Child now eats sitting at a 90 degree angle, supported with a tray. Baby takes 11 or more ounces of food/liquid per feeding, eating 4-6 times a day. Your baby should be eating liquids, pureed foods, and ground or junior stage foods, and using the upper lip to clear the spoon.

8 – 12 months: Child is able to eat coarsely chopped table foods, including easily chewed meats. Liquids should be taken primarily from a cup. Child is able to transfer food from one side of the mouth to the other

12 – 18 months: Child begins to eat unsupported at the family table or at a small child's chair and table. Your child should be eating coarsely chopped table foods, including most meats and many raw vegetables. Child can take a controlled and sustained bite on a hard cookie, and chews with lips closed.

So, when should you be concerned about your child's feeding? If you notice that your child is not able to meet the milestones listed above by the end of the stage, or you can answer yes to any of the questions below, you should talk to your pediatrician.

- Does your child have difficulty gaining weight?
- Does it take your baby longer than 40 minutes to drink from a regular-sized bottle?
- Does your baby have difficulty coordinating sucking and swallowing?
- Does your child have breathing disruptions or apnea during feeding?
- Have you observed persistent fussiness or irritability associated with feedings?
- Does your child demonstrate prolonged gagging or choking?
- Do you have difficulty advancing food textures with your child?

If your pediatrician is also concerned about your child's feeding skills, they may recommend a feeding evaluation by a feeding therapist. Keep in mind, all children develop at their own pace – however, you should always be comfortable bringing up your concerns with your physician. Theraplay, Inc. provides feeding evaluations and feeding therapy to children with a prescription from your physician. You can contact Theraplay at (610)436-3600 to further answer any feeding questions you may have.