

ESTABLISHING GOOD FEEDING HABITS

Development of good feeding habits is a necessary aspect of healthy infant and child development. It is vitally important that your child's eating and drinking skills are monitored to ensure that your child is gaining adequate nutrition and that the structures of the face and mouth needed for good eating and drinking skills are also being well developed in readiness for later speech development.

Good feeding position is one aspect necessary to encourage successful feeds. The type of feeding position used depends on the age of your child.

The types of food a child can eat also depends on the age of the child.

At 1 month of age:

- Child fed liquids only from a bottle or breast.

At 4 – 6 months of age:

- Usually introduced to cereal-type food and pureed foods.

At 8 months of age:

- Child fed liquids, pureed foods, ground or junior foods and mashed table food.

At 12 months of age:

- Child fed liquids, coarsely chopped table food, including meats that are easy to chew.

At 18 months of age:

- Child is fed liquids and coarsely chopped table foods which include most meats and many raw vegetables.

Some aspects of feeding which will require intervention by a speech pathologist include:

- difficulties with sucking and swallowing – including a weak suck or difficulty co-ordinating sucking and swallowing when feeding
- difficulty breathing whilst feeding
- coughing, choking, gagging or vomiting during meals
- recurrent chest infections
- baby's voice sounds 'wet' when vocalizing
- any new occurrences of feeding difficulties
- difficulty holding saliva / food or drink in mouth
- behavioural difficulties such as increased irritability during feed times, lethargic behaviours or lessened alertness during meals
- increased time taken to finish eating meals (over 30 – 40 minutes)
- if your child has been diagnosed with any disorders associated with swallowing difficulties
- refusing food for no apparent reason or failure to thrive.