

SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT MY CHILD'S DRIBBLING?

Dribbling is a normal part of a child's early development. Increased dribbling is often linked to or exacerbated by teething or a cold. As children get older, they become more aware of sensations in and around the mouth, as well as developing better control over the movements of their lips, tongue and jaw. This control is also important for eating, drinking and speech development.

Dribbling may require investigation if it is associated with :

- sucking, chewing or swallowing difficulties
- other concerns about feeding (for example, rejecting solid foods)
- difficulty keeping the lips together
- persistent breathing through the mouth (which may be due to a runny or blocked nose)
- delayed speech development.

Dribbling may also require investigation if it is excessive and / or persists past 2 - 3 years of age.

Two year old children may occasionally dribble when they are concentrating on an activity, such as drawing, playing with dough or building with blocks.

In older children, problems with dribbling are likely to result from difficulties associated with :

- reduced strength, control or tone in the muscles of the face
- poor posture
- lack of awareness about the problem
- mouth breathing / difficulty keeping the lips together.

Excessive dribbling may result in skin irritation or a rash on the chin. For older children, the problem may cause embarrassment and / or social problems.

WHAT TO DO?

1. General Strategies

- Even babies will engage in copying games, using lip and tongue movements, such as poking tongues, blowing raspberries and kisses. Later on, practice with blowing bubbles or drinking through a straw will help to develop good lip control. The aim of these activities is to increase the child's awareness of mouth movements, while

strengthening the muscles of the face, particularly the lips, tongue and jaw.

Good control of lip, tongue and jaw movements is necessary for saliva control and clear production of speech sounds, as well as competent eating and drinking.

- Verbal reminders such as “lips together” may focus the child’s attention on closing the lips and swallowing saliva.

2. Consult a speech pathologist for advice on:

- Strategies to improve awareness of dribbling and control of saliva
- Exercises to strengthen the muscles of the mouth and face
- Eating and drinking
- Speech development.