

# Normal Oral Motor and Swallowing Development

Feeding is an integral part of overall development, there are several areas to be aware of and several areas for potential issues that may require therapeutic intervention.

Feeding therapy helps infants and children with a wide array of feeding difficulties which may include one or more of the following:

- Reduced or limited intake
- Food refusal
- Food selectivity by type and/or texture
- Dysphagia (swallowing difficulty)
- Oral motor deficits
- Delayed feeding development
- Food or swallowing phobias
- Mealtime tantrums

The Occupational Therapist will assess oral-motor and swallowing skills to determine if the infant or child has a physical problem or lack of oral-motor skill that is interfering with the child's ability to eat an appropriate diet safely.

## Typical development includes

0-3 months	Rooting reflex turn head toward stimulation) Gag reflex
4-6 months	Munching begins Jaw, lips and tongue do not move independently Pats and holds bottle with assist
7-9 months	Lower lip pulls to remove food from utensils Upper lip cleans spoon Finger feeding with index and thumb
10-12 months	Upper teeth used to clean lower lip Beginning spoon to mouth More controlled chewing pattern
13-18 months	Learning to suck through a straw Weaning off bottle Drinking independently from a cup
19-36 months	Tongue cleans lips Loss of liquid when drinking is minimal

Many infants and children with GERD have delayed feeding skills because the pain they associate with feeding caused them to refuse feeding altogether or refuse certain types or textures of foods and they don't gain the needed oral-motor experience to develop the physical skills needed to safely consume the type of diet they should be consuming.

Addressing feeding problems may be important for preventing or eliminating nutritional concerns, growth concerns including failure to thrive, unsafe swallowing which may lead to aspiration pneumonia and future poor eating habits/ attitudes.

Parents are often the first ones to notice feeding problems. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your child's eating, drinking or swallowing please contact Primary Therapy Source and schedule an appointment.

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