

INTRODUCING SOLID FOOD TO CHILDREN WITH FEEDING PROBLEMS

FIRST:

Make sure your child can safely eat by mouth. Consult a speech-language pathologist for an evaluation. If necessary, have your child have a modified barium swallow test to determine if he can eat and drink safely by mouth. The test takes a moving X-ray of food and liquid while they are being swallowed.

NEXT- YOU CAN'T SKIP STEPS:

Oral skills develop in a stepwise fashion. *Steps cannot be skipped.* A child can only learn to bite and chew after learning how to eat foods with softer textures first.

FOODS TO INTRODUCE FIRST:

Strained foods: Strained foods have the consistency of applesauce. Strained fruits, vegetables, or cooked cereals are all acceptable foods to try first.

FOODS TO INTRODUCE SECOND:

Pureed foods: Pureed foods have the consistency of mashed potatoes. Your child should not move to pureed foods until he can manage strained foods without difficulty.

FOODS TO INTRODUCE THIRD:

Foods with soft lumps (mechanical soft foods): Mechanical soft foods have soft lumps such as scrambled eggs or pasta. Once your child can eat pureed foods without difficulty, he may move to mechanical soft foods.

FOODS TO PROMOTE BITING AND CHEWING SKILLS:

Foods that are crunchy when dry but soften in the mouth: Cheetos, crackers, cheerios, French fries, for example. When your child can handle these foods well, you may introduce other crunchy foods.

FOODS THAT MAY BE DIFFICULT TO MANAGE:

Foods that are stringy and tough should be avoided, such as some cuts of meat, or pineapple. Peanut butter and other goeey foods should be introduced only to children who have developed good oral skills.

WHAT IF MY CHILD CANNOT MOVE PAST PUREED or MECHANICAL SOFT FOODS?

The good news is that you can follow a perfectly healthy and nutritionally balanced diet on pureed (or mechanical soft) foods. If your child is making progress with his oral-motor skills, he may eventually be able to transition to foods with texture. But if he must stay on pureed foods, it will not harm him nutritionally.

MY CHILD HAS BEEN CLEARED FOR ORAL EATING BUT DOES NOT SEEM TO WANT TO EAT MUCH. WHAT CAN I DO TO INCREASE HIS ORAL FEEDING?

Give him time to get used to oral eating. Start by offering 1 or 2 very small spoonfuls of food per meal. As soon as you put the food in his mouth, encourage him to eat and swallow it. Praise him immediately- clap, hug and kiss him, or say "good job!" When he is consistently taking a few bites at every meal, consult a dietitian to assist you in cutting back on tube feedings. Or refer your child to a Feeding Clinic for more assistance.

IF MY CHILD CANNOT EAT BY MOUTH NOW, HOW CAN I PREPARE HIM FOR FUTURE ORAL EATING?

By carrying out an oral stimulation program. Consult a speech-language pathologist or occupational therapist to help you design a specific program for your child. Also, see our handouts on this topic.

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