

Preparing your baby for feeding

How can I help my baby eat better?

Some infants are sensitive to touch around their face and inside their mouth. This can be caused by stressful experiences in and around their mouth early in life. Over-stimulation can make babies “shut down” and stop eating. This sheet lists some activities that can help babies overcome this problem and eat better.

This home program should be used only under the guidance of an occupational therapist.

Activity suggestions

Before feeding by mouth, make sure your baby is awake and ready to eat:

- Turn lights up slowly.
- Turn on music or mobile.
- Hold baby in your lap.
- Sing or read to baby.
- Walk with baby.
- Show some toys.
- Bring baby’s hands to face and mouth.
- Let baby suck on a pacifier or clean finger.

Your therapist will help you learn the signs that your baby is ready to eat, such as:

- awake
- bringing hands to mouth
- sucking on pacifier
- opening mouth and turning head toward breast or bottle

Signs that your baby is **not** ready to eat may include:

- fussiness
- gagging
- spitting up
- arching back and neck
- looking away from you

When baby is ready, follow the checked instructions to prepare for eating:

Massage

Start with firm non-moving touch and progress to massage strokes, using gentle, firm pressure. Massage and stroke in this order:

- feet and legs
- hands and arms
- trunk
- head
- face
- mouth

Firmly touch your baby’s face and mouth as taught by your therapist:

- Touch the head and brow.
- Stroke toward the lips and mouth from:
 - the ears
 - under the eyes
 - under the chin
- Touch around the lips and then inside the mouth.
- Use your index finger to press firmly along the gums, from the front of the mouth to the sides and back.

- Next, stroke the roof of the mouth from the back to the front.
- Lastly, touch the most sensitive areas, the tongue or inside of the cheeks, using firm pressure.

During feedings, stop any other stimulation so your baby can concentrate on eating.

Other:

Questions?

This home program is to be used only under the guidance of an occupational therapist. If you have any problems with this home program, or any questions, please call your therapist in the Developmental and Rehabilitation Services Department.

Therapist signature

Date

Phone

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