

A15 – Developing feeding and drinking skills

When developing independence in feeding, it is important to ensure the child is supported well in a stable seated position, at a table top, with their feet flat on the floor or supportive surface. Hips and knees to be flexed to 90 degrees on a chair or ensure that they are stable in floor sitting. Ensure that all distractions are kept to a minimum both Visual and Auditory e.g. reduce visual distractions on the table or tray and auditory distractions with machine sounds or movement stimulus from the immediate environment.

Aim: To help the child to achieve purposeful assisted actions, working towards increasing their independent responses. This is achieved by providing additional support with:

- increasing tolerance and acceptance of unfamiliar or new activities for sensory skill development,
- isolated finger work and use of hand over hand techniques to teach the coordinated use of hands in functional grasps, resistive force and controlled or more precise directional actions and responses

Activities

Introduce the activities at a graded level, within the child's individual level of tolerance and achievement.

Understanding that **sensory awareness** and **integration** are essential - before **strength** and **coordination** in the hand will emerge efficiently.

The hand needs to be **powerful**, but at other times it needs to make **delicate** movements. **Power** in the hand develops before **precision**.

Activity suggestions

Messy play exploration that involves:

- scooping or filling containers, tipping out or pouring control from one container to another
- using sand, lentils, beans, rice, water and progress to thickened consistency foods
- mixing actions with plastic cups, spoons, small Tupperware, play teapots and sugar bowls
- symbolic play with teddy bear tea parties and picnics
- mud pies and make mud and sand castles with gardening exploration to dig earth and mix potions
- cake making to assist with mixing (and tasting) or biscuit or cake decorating, to make faces with cereals and fondant or jams

Strategies to learn to use a spoon

- Always give the child an additional or their own spoon if they are showing an interest in participating with self-feeding skills. You can continue to feed using your spoon.

- Provide minimal assistance to scoop food up from the plate and raise arm to take the spoon up to mouth.
- Lipped plates may help when learning to scoop foods onto the spoon.
- Hand over hand assistance may support with teaching more efficient hand grasp and wrist ranges, to empty the spoon.
- Caring cutlery or angled spoon handles or spoon heads may assist with maintaining functional grasps, and encourage greater wrist ranges, for greater success in taking the spoon to mouth. www.homecraft-rolyan.com or www.boots.com
- Slowly reduce the amount of support or help provided.

Activity suggestions

Theraputty or Playdough activities that involve using one or both hands to:

- stick individual fingers into a ball of putty
- squeeze, pound and roll the putty into different shapes
- roll into a log and use a plastic fork and knife to stab or hold and cut into pieces
- roll the putty out flat with a rolling pin and use cookie cutters to make shapes
- press the putty through a shape press and cut into slices

Strategies to learn to use a fork

- Cut up the food into small bite size pieces and demonstrate how to stab the food with the fork to achieve pick-up.
- Use soft foods initially.
- Hand over hand assistance may support with teaching more efficient grasp and wrist ranges.
- As their fork pick-up skills progress, encourage improved in-hand grasp of the fork with the index finger isolated and placed on the back of the fork, for increased stab control.
- Practice outside of mealtimes with bananas and other soft foods.

Activity suggestions

Squeezing putty, small balls or Eggsercizer's to develop 'hand expansion span' grasps and wrist joint stability, to develop tactile, deep pressure and proprioceptive sensory information and the motor components (strengthening and mobility development) of the hand and arm is the desired result.

Strategies to learn to hold and drink from an open cup

- Encourage use of two hands to hold the cup.
- Put small amounts of liquid into the cup initially.
- Try thicker drinks (smoothies/shakes) initially.
- Allow the child to explore independent drinking skills – pouring the liquid down themselves or over the table is an important part of learning.

Strategies to learn to drink from a straw

- Reduce the length of the straw.
- Use a firmer straw.
- Use a wider diameter or width of straw.
- Demonstrate drinking from a straw and exaggerate the action of your cheeks sucking in.
- When using a carton, carefully and gently squeeze the carton to assist with the drink rising up the straw. Be cautious of overfilling the mouth to prevent choking or ideally use a **Honey Bear with Straw from TalkTools®** to control the flow of liquid into a child's mouth
www.talktools.com

Repeated opportunity to practice on a regular basis is essential for successful achievement.

See additional:

A7 – Bilateral hand skills

A12 - Developing isolated finger movement preparation for hand activities

Frequency of use: Complete 10-15 minutes sessions every day as part of the child's normal daily routine.

Monitor the child's level of response (interest and motivation) in the task and adjust accordingly (to simplify or increase) to obtain the 'just right fit' and grade challenges (less challenging to more challenging).