

Feeding according to development level

A child's developmental stage is more important than age when it comes to feeding skills.

Just like walking and talking, feeding is a developmental skill that follows a specific order. A child needs to have the early skills before moving to more advanced skills.

The table on the back of this handout shows 6 stages of oral motor skills (what a child's mouth is doing) and what foods and liquids to feed them at each stage. Just like we match motor activities to a child's motor development stage (what movements a child's body can do), we should choose foods and liquids that match their oral motor development stage.

Use this table to find your child's current oral motor skills and their development stage. This information helps you know which foods and liquids to feed them now and what foods and liquids come next as they move on to a new stage.

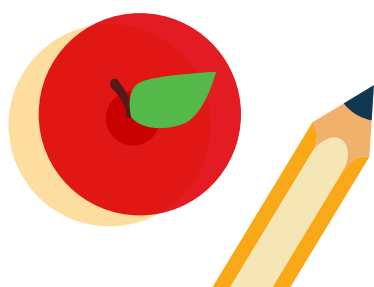
Watch for signs that the foods or liquids your child is given do not match their oral motor development stage.

These signs include:

- gagging or vomiting while eating or drinking
- choking or coughing while eating or drinking
- spitting out food
- holding food in their mouth/cheeks
- swallowing or trying to swallow food before it is well chewed
- refusing to eat (e.g. turning their head away, closing their mouth tight)

Moving to a stage before a child is ready increases their risk of choking. It may also affect their nutrition and growth, and can lead to negative experiences with food.

If you are not sure of your child's feeding stage, speak to your child's health care provider.



Feeding according to development level

Developmental Stage	Oral motor skills	Foods and liquids to give
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sucking Tongue thrust: The tongue pushes purees or solid food out the mouth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only liquids like breastmilk or formula
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sucking Mouth opens when spoon is coming Tongue starts to move food from the front to the back of the mouth to swallow without pushing food out The tongue thrust is gone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smooth pureed (blended) foods like applesauce, yogurt, pudding with no lumps or chunks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nutrients are not lost when you put food in a blender to turn it into a puree When a bowl of food is pureed, it will look like there is less food but it will have the same nutritional content
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Munching chew begins: The jaw moves up and down when chewing Tongue begins to move to the side. This brings the food to the side teeth for chewing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thicker smooth purees like mashed potatoes or banana: Make sure there are no lumps or chunks Use very dissolvable (melt in the mouth) crunchy solids (e.g. rice rusks) to work on chewing skills
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Munching chew gets better Rotary chewing starts to happen: The jaw moves side to side to crush foods while chewing Tongue easily moves side to side to help bring the food to the side teeth for chewing Lips are open during chewing, so some food/liquid may fall out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finely chopped soft foods (e.g. egg, overcooked vegetables) Use harder crunchy dissolvable solids that melt in the mouth (e.g. "O" cereal pieces, crackers, digestive cookies, toast) to keep working on chewing
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotary chewing gets better, but there is still some munching Tongue can move food to both sides of the mouth and to the centre of the mouth Lips are better at staying closed while eating but a little food/liquid may still fall out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bite-sized pieces of soft foods such as fish, ground meat, cooked vegetables, soft fruits, well-cooked pasta Foods that have both a solid and liquid part (two or more textures) such as cereal with milk or noodle soups are difficult and should be avoided
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotary chewing is well established Lips are mostly closed while chewing and swallowing Good tongue coordination and control Jaw can open bigger or smaller when biting foods of different thicknesses (e.g. thin cookie vs. large hamburger) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular foods such as meats, raw fruits and vegetables, breads, rice Can manage foods with two or more textures like cereal with milk or noodle soup

Remember: As a child reaches the next developmental stage, they can continue to eat foods and liquids from earlier stages.

