

Occupational Therapy Handout



FEEDING AND MEALTIMES

Helping your child learn to feed themselves can be a lot of fun - don't expect every mouthful to be a success, and be prepared for a mess!

Sitting at Mealtimes

- ☺ Encourage your child to sit at a table while eating.
- ☺ Your child should be able to comfortably rest their elbows on the table, so make sure they are not too low. It may help if their feet are supported.
- ☺ You might find it helps to use a booster cushion, a 'tripp trapp' style seat or simply a box or step under their feet.

Early days

- ☺ Finger foods will help your child to be more independent at mealtimes, and to explore different textures.
- ☺ Encourage your child to hold their own bottle or beaker while drinking.
- ☺ When helping your child to eat, it will be easier for you both if you sit on their preferred side (i.e. if they are right-handed, sit to their right).

Using a spoon

- ☺ At first support their hand while they hold the spoon. Hold their elbow with your other hand to guide the spoon to their mouth. Gradually reducing the support you give them, eventually offering help only when needed.
- ☺ Take your time. It can be a slow process but is important for them to learn the sequence and movements required.
- ☺ Give your child lots of praise and encouragement, otherwise they may lose interest and prefer to let you feed them.
- ☺ Encourage your child to hold the bowl steady with one hand whilst holding their spoon in the other hand. This will help them to scoop food in order to load their spoon.
- ☺ If the bowl keeps slipping, you can use a non-slip mat or damp cloth underneath, or use a suction bowl.
- ☺ Start with foods which are easy to scoop up and stick to the spoon such as yoghurt, custard, porridge and mash.

Using cutlery

- ☺ Introduce a fork when you believe your child is ready to 'stab' small pieces of food.
- ☺ As your child's skills develop, you can let them try using a child's knife to cut toast or spread something on it. This will encourage them to use two hands together and help them learn how much pressure to use.

Hand coordination

Any games or activities that encourage your child to hold one hand still while moving the other will help them develop the skills to use a knife and fork.

For example:

- ☺ Using spoons and scoops during play, such as feeding dolls, sand and water play.
- ☺ Using a dustpan and brush, keeping the dustpan still and moving the brush.
- ☺ Using scissors, keeping the paper still and moving the scissors.
- ☺ Playing with play dough, practicing cutting with cutlery.
- ☺ Cooking and baking, holding a bowl while mixing with a spoon, or spooning the mixture out of the bowl.
- ☺ Opening screw top bottles and jars.
- ☺ Colouring, ensuring the paper is held with one hand whilst the other hand does the colouring.