

Guidelines for the Development of Self-Feeding Skills

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Self-care skills are the basic tasks we perform every day. Self-care skills are also known as Activities of Daily Living (ADLs). The self-care skills children learn early on are self-feeding, dressing, bathing, and grooming. This handout will give a basic guideline for the development of self-feeding skills.

Self-feeding provides a fun and easy way for a child to explore different sensory experiences and feels. This is a great opportunity for the child to play with and feel crumbly, rough, wet, squishy, spongy, and slippery textures. Foods also provide different sounds, smells, and tastes. Self-feeding can be messy, but being allowed to be messy will help a child gain confidence, become comfortable with different textures, and develop strength and coordination in the hands and fingers.



In addition, using forks, spoons, and cups are some of the earliest opportunities for a child to learn how to use tools. Learning to use tools is important as the child grows and starts to draw with crayons, write with pencils, and cut with scissors.

A child who is practicing and learning self-feeding skills is also improving:

- Strength in his/her back, arms, and hands.
- Using both arms and hands together.
- Coordination in his/her arms and hands.
- Eye-hand coordination.

Drinking from a Bottle/Cup

Age	Milestone
2 to 4 months	Moves hand/hands up to the bottle/breast while feeding
6 to 9 months	Holds a bottle with both hands Uses a cup with help
12 to 15 months	Holds a cup with both hands Takes a few sips without help
15 to 18 months	Uses a straw
2 to 3 years	Drinks from a cup (no lid) without spilling

Self-Feeding

Age	Milestone
6 to 9 months	Wants to help with feeding Starts holding and mouthing large crackers/cookies Plays with spoon; grabs/bangs spoon; puts both ends in mouth
9 to 13 months	Finger feeds soft foods and foods that melt quickly Enjoys finger feeding
12 to 14 months	Dips spoon in food Moves spoon to mouth but is messy and spills
15 to 18 months	Scoops food with a spoon and feeds self
18 to 24 months	Wants to feed himself/herself
2 to 3 years	Stabs food with fork Uses spoon without spilling
3 to 5 years	Eats by himself/herself

Children with impaired motor skills and/or developmental disabilities may have a harder time learning these skills. Let the child's abilities guide the speed they acquire self-feeding skills and gradually progress from the simpler skills to more complex ones.

Games/Activities

Imitation and play can also help children develop self-feeding skills. Include the following games/activities into your child's day to help your child learn to feed himself/herself.

- Scoop and pour water in the bathtub using stacking or measuring cups.
- Use a spoon to scoop marshmallows.
- Use scoops and shovels in a sandbox.
- Put small objects through holes into containers.
- Play with play dough—scooping, stabbing, cutting, and pinching pieces.
- Pretend to feed a baby doll.
- Have imaginary tea parties, picnics, or meals.



Resource

Case-Smith, J. (2005). *Occupational therapy for children: Fifth edition*. St. Louis: Elsevier Inc.



Helpful Products

Here are some Super Duper® products that can reinforce your child's self-feeding skills. Visit www.superduperinc.com or call 1-800-277-8737. Click the links below to see the product and description.

Animal Buddies® Open-ended Motivational Box with Tokens

Ask for Item #AB-23

www.superduperinc.com/A_Pages/ab23.htm

Webber® Photo Cards—Food

Ask for Item #WFC-04

www.superduperinc.com/WXYZ_Pages/wfc_04.htm