

What is Dysphagia and Feeding Therapy?

Dysphagia is the term given to children and infants who have difficulty eating, drinking, and swallowing foods and liquids. A child with dysphagia may refuse to eat, be a picky eater, or act up during meal times. Dysphagia looks different for every child and will look different at different ages.

Feeding therapy is a type of therapy that is provided by a speech-language pathologist to help a child overcome difficulties with eating and drinking .

Feeding Problems Require a Team Approach

Each child's team will look different but here is a list of some of the specialists who may be needed to help treat a child's feeding problems:

- Family members and caregivers,
- A speech-language pathologist who specializes in swallowing and feeding,
- One or more physicians (e.g., a pediatrician, neonatologist, physiatrist, otolaryngologist, pulmonologist, endocrinologist, neurologist, neurosurgeon, cardiac surgeon, and/or gastroenterologist),
- A registered dietitian,
- A nurse or nurse practitioner,
- An occupational therapist,
- A psychologist,
- A social worker,
- A board certified lactation consultant,
- A physical therapist.

Types of Treatments:

Behavioral Interventions: Modifying environment and working to change the behaviors associated with mealtimes using strategies like prompting, modeling, fading, etc.

Postural/Positioning Techniques: There are many different types of positions or postures that can help a child eat or drink more safely.

Diet Modification: Changing the physical characteristics of the foods and liquids that a child eats and drinks may make it so that he can more safely and happily consume them.

Equipment/Utensils: Certain types of feeding equipment and utensils can provide alternative ways for infants and children to get food and liquid into their systems.

Biofeedback: Visual feedback that helps children understand how their body is currently working to swallow foods.

Maneuvers: Exercises that can be practiced to increase the strength and improve the timing of feeding and swallowing behaviors

Oral-Motor Treatments: Stimulation to or actions of the mouth and throat to encourage appropriate feeding and swallowing.

Pacing and Cue-based Feeding Strategies: Changing the pacing of how quickly food/liquid enters the mouth as well as the cues given to the child can make eating and drinking more safe for the child.

Prosthetics/Appliances: Certain physical implements can be placed inside the child's mouth to assist in safe feeding.

Sensory Stimulation: Providing sensory stimulation to different parts of the mouth and throat can encourage the child to chew and swallow more effectively.

Tube Feeding: Last Resort