



Let's Talk

Feeding and Swallowing Problems in Children

“ My grandson Javon had a lot of stomachaches when he was a baby. He used to throw up every day. Now he is 3, and he won't eat many foods. He throws a fit if his parents try to make him eat. He is very small for his age because of how little he eats. I worry about him every day. ”

—Florence

Does Your Child Have Problems Eating?

It is important that your child eat enough to grow and be healthy. There are many possible reasons why your child may not eat. He may have stomach or breathing problems, or his muscles may be weak. He may be very sensitive to how foods feel in his mouth. However, there may be no clear reason why your child refuses to eat.

If your child has a feeding and swallowing problem, he may:

- Not eat or drink
- Cough and choke when eating
- Get food in his lungs, called aspiration
- Make mealtimes stressful for the whole family
- Not eat at school or with friends

How Can a Speech-Language Pathologist Help?

Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, work with children who have speech, language, and swallowing problems. SLPs work in schools, hospitals, and clinics, and can even come to your home. Your child's SLP will find out what is causing your child's feeding and swallowing problems; this is called an evaluation.

What Happens During an Evaluation?

Your SLP will talk with you about the problems your child is having. Your SLP will also ask for information from your doctor about your child's health. Your SLP will look at how your child moves her lips, tongue, and jaw, and watch her nurse or eat.

Fast facts

- Children can have problems eating and swallowing.
- Feeding and swallowing problems can be caused by other health problems.
- Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, can help.

Your SLP often works with other professionals as a team. The team may recommend tests to look at your child's lungs or stomach. Your child may also have special tests to study her swallowing. If you don't understand what is going to happen or why your child is having a test, ask your SLP.

Some tests involve giving your child food or liquid mixed with barium. You may hear different names for this swallowing test such as:

- Videofluoroscopic swallowing study
- Modified barium swallow study
- Cookie swallow
- Esophagram

Another test involves putting a small lighted tube down your child's throat. You might hear this called:

- Fiberoptic endoscopic evaluation of swallowing, or FEES

- Endoscopy

Will Treatment Make a Difference?

Your SLP can work on feeding and swallowing in different ways and show you how to help your child eat. This can include:

- Using different positions when eating
- Trying different ways to feed your child or have him eat
- Trying food and liquids that are easier to swallow
- Keeping mealtime as stress-free as possible
- Finding ways to get your child to try different foods

“An SLP is working with Javon to make eating more fun. The SLP also is helping him try different types of food. She is showing my daughter-in-law how to help Javon at home. He has stopped having tantrums at meals and is starting to eat more.”

—Florence

Feeding and swallowing problems can change your child's life. Help is available.

To learn more about feeding and swallowing problems in children or to find an SLP near you who has been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), visit www.asha.org or call 800-638-8255 or (TTY) 301-296-5650.

My SLP's name is

Appointment

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