

In Focus: Feeding Disorders by Oo Kah Pheng, SLP

“My child just sits in front of the dining table for hours without picking up the spoon or food.”

“My child rather suffer than eat. It is so difficult to put even one grain of rice into his mouth.”

“My child just swallows everything that goes into the mouth. She does not even want to chew or bite the food.”

“My child throws a tantrum to avoid food.”

These are some of the signs and symptoms of feeding disorders. Many do not realize that this is a big issue. According to information provided by American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA), approximately 25% of children experience feeding disorders.

What is feeding disorders?

We usually refer to the term ‘feeding disorders’ as a condition in which an infant or child is unable or refuses to eat, or has difficulty in eating. This unpleasant feeding experience can result in frequent sickness, failure to thrive, and even death.

Some common types of feeding disorders in infants or children:

1. Premature infants

Infants born prior to 32 weeks gestational age often encounter poor sucking skills. These babies are easily tired and may also have breathing difficulties due to the immaturity of their lungs. Besides that, their oral structure and throat muscles can be weak which may cause them to have low stamina for feeding. These babies may also show poor sleep-wake states, and they may have trouble communicating hunger cues.

2. Behavioral feeding issues

These children show tantrums during meal times. They may have some sensory issues at the hard palate or soft palate areas. They are usually picky with food: some children love crunchy food while others may like lumpy food. Some children do not know how to chew on the food that goes into their mouth.

3. Infant reflux

Infants who have increased muscle tone in the abdominal area, prematurity and those with low tone of internal organs usually have reflux issues. Reflux causes an uneasy feeling during feeding and may cause feeding issues at a later stage.

4. Oral motor structures

Infants who are born with cleft lip and palate may present with difficulties in production suction, slow weight gain and nasal reflux. Correct positioning and suitable feeding bottles/teats will help to ensure thin liquid is pushed into the pharynx and away from the nasal cavity.

Feeding Disorders (cont.)

Signs and symptoms of feeding disorders:

- ⇒ Refusal to eat or drink at all
- ⇒ Taking a longer time to finish one meal
- ⇒ Preference for certain texture, colour or type of food
- ⇒ Behavioral problems such as kicking, hitting or crying at every meal
- ⇒ Choke, gag or vomit during meal time
- ⇒ Poor weight gain
- ⇒ Does not like to chew on solid food by 18 months
- ⇒ Persistently drooling during meal time



Feeding tips:

Feeding tip:
Keep trying!
Sometimes
children need more
than 10 times
exposure to accept
new food!

- ⇒ Establish feeding routine regardless of the feeding issues.
- ⇒ Keep the feeding time short.
- ⇒ Always make sure to end the feeding session with happy ending
- ⇒ Taking regular breaks to burp may be necessary as your baby will likely swallow a lot of air while learning to feed.
- ⇒ Stroking the baby under the chin while feeding will sometimes help the feeding progress.
- ⇒ Ensure the child has good positioning during feeding.
- ⇒ Offer new food without pressure - sometimes letting them prepare the food together may help them to feel 'safe'.
- ⇒ Be a positive model to your child during meal time
- ⇒ Keep trying; sometimes children need more than 10 times exposure to accept new food.

Laugh-a-minute

A 5 year-old sister said to her 10 months-old brother: "You gotta learn to talk, Jeffrey — it's part of the aging process"

Patient: "I have this constant ringing in my ears. I think I have tinnitus."

Audiologist: "Does it sound like an 'eeeeeee' or a 'shhhhh'?"

Patient: "It's like the murmur of a thousand forgotten souls quietly lamenting past sorrows."

Audiologist: "Hmmm. I don't have a checkbox for that, sadly."



A Parent's ABCs to a Clinician

by Pamela Thomas Joseph, SLP

Allow mourning to take place.

Believe in my ability as a parent.

Create a loving atmosphere in which I can speak to you openly.

Dream about the possibilities we can achieve together.

Ensure evidence based approaches.

Forgive honest mistakes.

Give your heart and mind to each meet.

Help me understand what's going on.

Include me in all decisions.

Jot down our goals and progress-lest one of us forgets.

Kindly include my spouse and our other children.

Let me try a hand at therapy- I can.

Make me smile.

Notice improvements-even if it's small.

Openly discuss important matters.

Praise my child for his efforts.

Question.

Rely on a higher power than your earthly self.

Set achievable targets.

Talk to me if things are not going well.

Understand my family.

Venture beyond what you are comfortable with.

Welcome my thoughts and comments.

X-ray all possible approaches and alternatives.

Yank away negativity.

Zealously pursue the best.

