

Feeding and Swallowing Disorders

Spotlight on: Toddlers



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Better Hearing & Speech Month

Eating is a process that a child learns. Getting food or drink into their mouth (using their hands, utensils, or a straw), closing their lips to keep the food in, chewing, getting ready to swallow—it's more complicated than it looks! Although most kids get the hang of it quickly, some will have lasting trouble.

What to Expect

As toddlers expand their world from breast- and/or bottle-feeding to table food and independent eating, a little trouble is expected. Drinks may spill from their mouth. They may gag on new foods. This is common. However, for some kids, these problems may last. This could be due to a **feeding disorder**. Other children may throw up, cough, or choke frequently while eating. Food may be going into their airway—this is the result of a **swallowing disorder**, called **dysphagia**.

Signs of Trouble

Toddlers may show the following signs of trouble:

- Cough or gag during meals
- Have problems chewing
- Eat only certain textures, such as soft food only or crunchy food only
- Take a long time to eat
- Refuse to eat or drink
- Get stuffy during meals
- Not gain weight or grow

Just "Picky"—or a Bigger Problem?

So-called picky eating is a common source of frustration among parents of toddlers. In most cases, picky eating does not rise to the level of a disorder. However, if a child is not growing as they should, has a severely limited diet, is showing persistent signs of trouble (as listed above), or gets extremely upset during meals or when presented with new foods, a larger problem may be to blame.

Treatment

Talk to your child's doctor if you are concerned. They may recommend seeing a speech-language pathologist, who can perform special tests to see what is happening in your child's mouth and throat when they eat. Speech-language pathologists help children with feeding or swallowing disorders by doing any or all of these things:

- Working with them to strengthen muscles for sucking, drinking, chewing, and swallowing
- Finding the best position for feeding
- Introducing new foods
- Advising parents on effective feeding techniques



Speech-language pathologists can help!

Learn more at www.asha.org/public.



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