

Infant Feeding Milestones and Behaviors

Although all babies develop at different rates, this checklist will help you track their feeding milestones.

0 to 3 months

- Sucks and swallows well during feeding
- Communicates hunger cues, such as:
 - Puts hands in mouth
 - Makes sucking noises
 - Opens mouth when touched on the chin, cheeks or lips
 - Cries or fusses
- Communicates fullness cues, such as:
 - Starts to suck less or lets milk run down his/her mouth
 - Releases the bottle and looks satisfied
 - Seals lips closed
 - Uses bottle as a pacifier

4 to 6 months

- Develops good head and neck control
- Can sit with support
- Communicates hunger cues, such as:
 - Opens mouth when he/she sees bottle
 - Makes sucking noises, sucks on fingers or fist
 - Fidgets and squirms a lot
- Communicates fullness cues, such as:
 - Turns head away from bottle
 - Falls asleep during feeding
 - Releases the bottle or starts playing with it
- Shows interest in eating foods

**Solid food introduction should occur around 6 months, and only after baby has met the above milestones.*

6 to 7 months

- Opens mouth for spoon and closes mouth over spoon
- Moves pureed food from spoon into mouth and swallows it
- Communicates hunger cues, such as:
 - Opens mouth for spoon or bottle
 - Smiles or coos during feeding to show he/she wants more
- Communicates fullness cues, such as:
 - Turns head away or closes mouth when spoon or bottle approach
 - Pays attention to his/her surroundings more than feeding

7 to 9 months

- Helps hold bottle during feeding
- Takes sips from an open cup with help
- Eats thicker, mashed and lumpy foods with more texture
- Makes a face when trying new foods and tastes
- Feeds self with fingers
- Feeds self with pre-loaded baby utensils
- Communicates hunger cues, such as:
 - Uses sign language, like "eat" or "more"
 - Points to food
- Communicates fullness cues, such as:
 - Uses sign language, such as "all done"
 - Turns head or pushes food away

10 to 12 months

- Drinks from an open cup with help
- Feeds self with baby utensils (and fingers)
- Eats a variety of foods from each food group
- Eats 3 meals and 1 to 2 healthy snacks a day
- Transitions to chopped table foods
- Communicates hunger cues, such as:
 - Tries to get into highchair
 - Uses sign language
 - Looks for or points to food
- Communicates fullness cues, such as:
 - Shakes head "no"
 - Uses sign language
 - Pushes food away
 - Throws food on the ground

Urge the family to contact the baby's doctor if:

- ✓ Baby coughs, chokes or experiences increased chest congestion after feeding (some gagging is normal and expected as baby tries new foods).
- ✓ Baby gets a mild rash or hives after feeding. Severe symptoms of a food allergy (severe hives, breathing problems, swelling and loss of consciousness) require immediate medical attention.
- ✓ You are concerned about baby's feeding milestones.
- ✓ Baby loses feeding skills he/she once had.

1-year-old Feeding Milestones and Behaviors

Young toddlers are growing and developing in many exciting ways. Below are some important feeding milestones to look for, behaviors to expect and signs the family may need to talk to the child's doctor.

Important Feeding Milestones

1. Transitions from a bottle to a cup:

- Stops drinking from a baby bottle
- Stops drinking formula (breastfeeding and breastmilk are OK long after the 1st birthday)
- Milk intake is limited to 2 to 3 cups (16 to 24 oz.) a day
- Drinks from an open cup by him/herself, using both hands

2. Self-feeds a variety of foods:

- Self-feeds pre-cut foods, with fingers or a spoon
- Eats at least 1 food from every food group
- Tries new foods (but not always!)
- Accepts different textures, such as smooth yogurt, grainy grits, lumpy oatmeal or cottage cheese, ground meat, ripe fresh fruit (e.g., peaches or bananas), soft vegetables, etc.
- Sits down for 3 meals and 1 to 3 healthy snacks each day, with only water in between

3. Communicates about food:

- Shows hunger, such as pointing to food, or signing or saying "eat" or "water"
- Shows fullness, such as pushing food away, signing or saying "all done," or trying to leave the table
- Shows food preferences and dislikes

Normal behaviors may include:

- Being a "messy eater" (e.g., playing with food and eating with hands)
- Making faces or spitting out foods he/she doesn't like
- Sometimes refusing to try new foods, refusing to eat foods he/she likes or refusing entire meals
- Eating more at some meals and less at other meals
- Asking for food between meals or snacks for reasons other than hunger (e.g., sees something he/she wants, he/she is bored, etc.)
- Asking for the same food over and over again

The family should talk to their child's doctor if:

- ✓ Child continues to prefer pureed or soft foods and has trouble transitioning to table foods
- ✓ Child will eat no foods from 1 or more food groups
- ✓ Child eats fewer than 15 different foods
- ✓ Child becomes upset (crying and screaming) when presented with new foods
- ✓ Child loses feeding skills he/she once had
- ✓ Child gags, coughs or chokes with a variety of foods or drinks
- ✓ Food or drinks leaks out of his/her mouth while eating or drinking

2-year-old Feeding Milestones and Behaviors

Toddlers are growing and developing in many exciting ways. Below are some important feeding milestones to look for, behaviors to expect and signs the family may need to talk to the child's doctor.

Important Feeding Milestones

1. Self-feeds and follows mealtime routines:

- ☐ Wants to feed him/herself without help
- ☐ Can scoop foods with a child-size spoon
- ☐ Starts successfully using a fork
- ☐ Drinks from an open cup by him/herself, using one hand
- ☐ Follows mealtime routines (initiates hand-washing before meals, helps set table or clean up, etc.)

2. Eats a wide variety of foods:

- ☐ Eats at least a few foods from every food group
- ☐ Sometimes tries new foods (but not always!)
- ☐ Accepts different textures, including fresh fruit and thinly sliced raw vegetables
- ☐ Sits down for 3 meals and 2 to 3 healthy snacks each day, with only water in between

3. Communicates about food:

- ☐ Uses words to communicate he/she is hungry, thirsty and full
- ☐ Names a variety of foods
- ☐ Shows food preferences and dislikes (which may change daily!)

Normal behaviors may include:

- Asking for food between meals or snacks for reasons other than hunger (e.g., sees something he/she wants, he/she is bored, etc.)
- Throwing tantrums at times about foods and during meals (e.g., because he/she wants a treat, he/she doesn't want to turn off the TV or put away a toy for mealtime, etc.)
- Imitating other children's eating behaviors and preferences
- Being a little picky, such as sometimes refusing to try new foods, refusing to eat foods he/she once liked or refusing entire meals
- Being a little messy, playing with food and eating with hands
- Asking for the same food over and over again

The family should talk to their child's doctor if:

- ✓ Child is not eating regular table foods
- ✓ Child still drinks from a bottle
- ✓ Child will eat no foods from 1 or more food groups
- ✓ Child eats fewer than 20 different foods
- ✓ Child becomes upset (crying and screaming) when presented with new foods
- ✓ Child loses feeding skills he/she once had
- ✓ Child regularly gags at meals
- ✓ Food or drink leaks out of his/her mouth while eating or drinking