

Key Stages in the Development of Eating and Drinking Skills

Here is some information about how eating and drinking skills develop over time.

If you have any concerns about your child's eating and drinking, please contact the [SLT helpline](#)

Age	Position of baby/child	Food/Fluid	Eating Patterns	Drinking Patterns	Self-feeding	Food related Play
Birth-3month	Semi-reclining	Milk, water, well diluted juice		Sucking, forward-backward tongue movement with simultaneous up-down jaw movement. Easy rhythmical movement. Sensitive gag.		Mouths hands, toys, clothes, feet etc;
3-6 months	More upright, requires support	As above with smooth solids introduced	Initially 'spits out' food, using habitual forward-backward tongue movement. Dribbles. Gradually learns to suck food from spoon.	Cup introduced		Enjoys babbling with a mouthful of food. Enjoys feeling food.
6-9 months	Upright – may require support	Can now take mashed foods. Finger foods that melt MAY be introduced under supervision.	More vertical tongue tip and less jaw movement. Able to bite food placed to SIDE of mouth. Sucks once food is on tongue. May still drool while teething	Initial liquid loss common as jaw moves up and down and tongue moves forward and back. Tongue may protrude slightly.	Can hold bottle without help. Puts hands to cup. Picks up bits of food.	Enjoys playing with food.
9-12 months	Sits upright independently, able to develop independent use of arms and hands	Firmer food is chopped and more varieties held in the hand. Spooned food is thicker. Copes with different utensils.	Tongue used to transfer food from side to side in mouth. Gag less sensitive, though still present. Upper lip active in taking food from spoon. May still drool when teething	Tongue moves forward and back. May protrude beneath the cup to stabilise it.	Allows adult to supervise and control feeding. Able to finger feed. Plays with food and practises with a spoon.	Mouths hands, toys, clothes, feet etc;

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12-18 months		Offered increasing varieties of firmer foods	Able to chew efficiently with lateral and rotatory tongue/jaw pattern. Lip closure is intermittent while chewing, but occurs when swallowing.	Can still bite on cup to stabilise it. Upper lip closes on edge of cup. Tongue does not protrude and less jaw movement is seen.	Able to bring filled spoon to mouth, can turn over en route. Finger feeds well. Holds cup.	Pretends to feed self/others/toys
18-24 months		Able to chew firmer foods	Able to use a controlled, sustained bite on a biscuit. Can chew with lips closed. May lose food or saliva while swallowing. Drooling should be resolving.	Uses and up-down sucking pattern with the cup between the lips. Internal jaw stabilisation developing, so no longer bites on the edge of cups.	Gradually improves with spoon and food to mouth, and becomes independent. Some spillage still. Improving with cup drinking independently.	Pretend feeding play with small scale toys.
24-36 months			Eats well with little spillage. Some assistance needed (but not always welcomed!).	Drinks well with little spillage.	Uses fork.	Enjoys playing with tea sets, pots and pans.
36-48 months					Spreads butter on bread with a knife.	More elaborate pretend play developing.
48-60 months					Cuts safely with a knife.	Increasingly elaborate and complex pretend play.