

The Successful Path to Feeding Development

Feeding development goes hand in hand with overall physical and oral development. Once your baby is strong enough to begin supported sitting, they are generally ready to begin the exciting journey of beginning solid food trials. Of course, always speak with your pediatrician to determine the best time to begin food trials with your baby. Infant feeding is not only about eating, it's about exploration and learning new textures, flavors and experiences. As your baby develops, they gain new oral motor skills and abilities to move food around in their mouth. Generally, babies lose their tongue trusting behaviors around 4 months. Between 4-6 months of age babies begin accepting smooth purees and are beginning to learn to transfer them back and swallow. This can be a fun time for exploration, allowing baby to explore these new tastes and textures. Babies love to explore with their hands and mouth. It's a great time to allow them to reach for and feel the food with their hands and attempt to bring purees to their mouth on their own hands. This time period is really all about exploration and learning and not about how much food your baby eats. It's going to be messy but fun!

Around 6-8 months babies gain increased head, neck, trunk and jaw support and strength. This not only allows them to reach physical milestones like sitting, it provides oral motor strength to support munching and mashing foods. This is a great time to introduce small pieces of solids that are easy for babies to mash and explore. I love introducing very small, soft pieces of mash-able fruits and vegetables during this time. Some great ideas are very small diced pieces of banana, avocado, cooked sweet potatoes and carrots. You can also increase pureed textures by adding oatmeal to purees your baby already takes successfully. Allowing your baby to touch and explore these foods, and maybe even bring to their own mouth, is an important developmental milestone at this stage.

By 7-10 months, your baby is growing and gaining new skills like crawling and pulling up to stand. This means they are also using their mouth in new ways. They are beginning to learn to move their tongue and food from middle to side to side. They can now begin to munch and mash foods. It is a great time to start introducing very small pieces of more solid items. Remember to be cautious with size and textures. At this age some babies are happily eating all sorts of solid foods, while some babies are not yet willing or able to trial these foods yet. They will love to reach for and attempt to bring small pieces of food to their mouths. You will probably see your baby beginning to develop a new stage of independence as they gain new confidence and ability to munch foods. This munching will soon progress to actual chewing abilities. Make sure to allow your baby to sit at the table and eat with the family. Eating together is not only important for feeding but also for social and communication development.

At 11-12 months and beyond, babies should be comfortable with many new tastes and textures. They should be exploring with food and are beginning to self-feed. Fine motor skills are advancing, and many babies love to hold their own utensils and attempt to feed themselves. Babies will be able to move their tongue and food from side to side and begin to develop a "real" rotary chew that will gradually allow them to successfully chew many new solid textures.

Infant feeding development involves growth in oral motor skills and sensory exploration. It should be a fun stage of guided self-exploration. Never feel the need to push your baby to try new textures or tastes. Remember that repeated introduction of a wide range of tastes and textures, presented in a fun learning environment, is the best path to healthy and successful eating.

Call the office at 704-379-7773 or email me at Jeannine@carolinakinderdevelopment.com if you have concerns about your baby or child's eating.