

# **SPECIAL REPORT**

## **The 5 Things You Must Know About Your Child's Feeding Problems**



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# The 5 Things You Must Know About Your Child's Feeding Problems

When you have a child with feeding problems, it can cause a tremendous amount of ***stress and frustration for you and your child***. To those of us who have never had eating issues, it can be difficult to understand how these negative patterns develop—and even more difficult to understand how to resolve them. Whether your child is a picky eater or a problem feeder, here are ***five things you must know*** in order to help your child:

## 1. **Eating is one of the most difficult things we do!**

It seems like eating is simple—we just sit down and eat, right? The reality is that eating requires a combination of many motor, sensory, and cognitive abilities—and it is one of the hardest things for children to do! **There are over 25 steps to successful eating**, including tolerating the smells and feel of foods; moving the mouth and tongue in appropriate ways; and approaching the eating process without fear. A breakdown in any part of this multi-step process can create feeding problems that range from mild to severe. Recognizing that feeding is a complex process, and that children can have real difficulties in

some or all of these steps, helps many parents move from frustration and anger to acceptance and understanding. ***Recognition that eating is a complex multi-step process is the first step in successfully treating your child's feeding difficulties.***

## **2. Sensory processing problems can play a role in feeding difficulties.**

We have to be able to take in and process (make sense of) the smells, textures, tastes, sight, and sounds of food in order to feel comfortable and be willing to put it in our mouths, chew, and swallow without fear or resistance. For children who have difficulty taking in sensory information from the environment and making sense of it, eating can be a nightmare! When we encounter a food, we are automatically confronted with a multitude of sensory information. If we cannot quickly take in and make sense of that information, then we may become resistive and fearful of coming into contact with these foods. ***Children with sensory processing problems often exhibit feeding issues due to a disruption in their sensory processing abilities.***

### **3. Oral-motor problems can play a role in feeding difficulties.**

From the moment we put food or drink to our lips, a series of oral-motor actions must take place to appropriately manage substances in our mouths. The lips, tongue, teeth, jaws, and other muscle groups must work together to move the food around, chew it into manageable pieces, and swallow. All of this must happen in a synchronized way or problems such as choking or gagging may occur. ***Children with weak oral motor strength or other problems in their oral anatomy will often have feeding issues.***

### **4. There is a developmental process that children go through to learn how to eat.**

Eating is a developmentally sequenced process that begins even before birth. If you think about how babies learn to eat from infancy on, you realize that it is a process that involves slow transitions in texture, amount, and variety. Babies engage in exploration of foods as they work their way to toddlerhood; and that includes exploring the smells, feel, taste, look, and sounds of foods; building the oral motor strength and skills required for successful eating; and developing the cognitive skills essential for the process to occur. It is so important to

recognize the developmental nature of eating because it allows us to go back and identify the skills that are missing. Many approaches to feeding fail because they do not go back and build the developmental foundations for successful feeding. ***Understanding feeding as a developmental process is critical for treating your child's feeding difficulties.***

#### **5. Traditional advice and tactics don't usually work.**

Because most people don't understand the four things mentioned above, the advice they offer for how to help children overcome their feeding difficulties ends up being less than helpful. There are many well meaning grandmothers, friends, and even people in the medical field who give advice like, "Just make him sit there until he eats," or "When she gets hungry enough she will eat"; or "Bribe him with things he likes." *While these tactics may work for some children, they will not address the sensory, oral, and developmental barriers experienced by children with true eating problems.* If your child has a feeding problem, you have probably tried all of those suggestions and more, only to be continually frustrated with the problem. The bottom line is this: Successful feeding requires much more than just sitting down to eat! ***Children must develop the sensory***

***processing, oral motor, and cognitive skills in a sequential way in order for them to overcome their feeding problems.***

You now have the basic information you need to better understand the nature of your child's feeding problems, and to seek out effective treatment.

*The next step is for you to contact a therapist who can get you on the path to identifying your child's obstacles to feeding accurately, and help you in developing a plan to address them effectively.* You can get all the

information and support you need to **start this process by calling**

**the Horizons team at (616) 698-0306, or sending an email to**

**[feeding@horizonsdrc.com](mailto:feeding@horizonsdrc.com)**. We look forward to helping you and your

child get on the path to less stressful, more successful eating together!



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