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## **Pediatric Feeding Therapy**

Pediatric feeding therapy addresses any oral motor and swallowing issues that make it difficult for children to chew and swallow foods and liquids safely, manage secretions, and tolerate various textures of food to ensure adequate nutrition and hydration. Treatment will address muscular and motor deficits as well any medical, behavioral, and sensory issues that may limit a child's ability to eat successfully.

Research has shown that nearly 80% of children with special needs and 20% of typically developing children experience feeding and swallowing difficulties.

Abilitations offers treatments across the full spectrum of feeding and swallowing disorders, from young infants who are choking during bottle feedings to toddlers and school age children who are picky eaters.

### **What are the warning signs that would warrant a feeding evaluation?**

- Choking, coughing, gagging during feeding
- Color changes when eating
- Congestion during or after eating
- Wet vocal quality
- Eye tearing
- Excessive vomiting or spitting up
- Feeding refusals
- Unable to tolerate pureed foods at 6 months
- Gagging on textured puree at 8 months
- Pocketing food
- Inability to transition to table/finger foods by 10-12 months
- Reliance upon liquids for the majority of calories beyond 12 months
- Difficulty transitioning from the bottle to a cup at 12 months
- Limited variety and texture
- Spitting foods out
- Swallowing food whole
- Slow weight gain
- G-tube dependence
- Excessive drooling

### **An oral sensori-motor evaluation and treatment may address:**

- Underlying medical factors
- Safety of swallowing
- Oral motor patterns
- Cup drinking
- Chewing
- Behavioral concerns

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- Sensory defensiveness
- Food aversions
- Positioning

**Diagnoses that frequently warrant feeding therapy include:**

- Autism spectrum disorders
- Cerebral palsy
- Sensory processing disorder
- Down Syndrome
- Cleft lip/palate
- Gastroesophageal reflux
- Motility issues
- Food allergy/intolerance
- Failure to thrive

**What does the process of a feeding evaluation and therapy entail?**

During the initial evaluation, a detailed history will be obtained to gather any pertinent information that may be contributing to a child's feeding and swallowing problems. The child will be offered a variety of foods and liquids so that the speech/language pathologist can observe his/her ability to manage the foods safely and any sensory and/or behavioral responses that are present. If warranted, a modified barium swallow study, a real-time x-ray of the swallowing mechanism, may be recommended to thoroughly assess coordination in the mouth and throat during the swallowing process. Following the evaluation, families will be provided with suggestions for safe food and liquid textures while an individualized therapy program is put into place.

Feeding therapy often requires a multi-disciplinary approach which is why the Abilitations team is excited to have the opportunity to provide feeding services from a speech/language pathologist to address oral motor patterns as well as from occupational therapists to address any underlying sensory issues. It is often necessary to collaborate with other medical professionals to identify, treat, and/or rule out issues that may contribute to feeding and swallowing disorders including pediatricians, GI doctors, allergists, and nutritionists.

Parents and caregivers are an integral piece of children's success in therapy and are encouraged to observe and participate in therapy sessions to learn different techniques that will help children to be more successful. Home programs are provided at each session to allow parents to maximize their children's potential in the home environment.