

Feeding your child with gastrointestinal problems



Why does my child have trouble eating?

Everyone must learn how to eat. It is a skill that begins to develop after birth. Sometimes, children with gastrointestinal (GI) problems have trouble eating. These children may:

- Need to have medical tests and procedures that are often done using the face and mouth. Children may find them painful or scary.
- Have feeding tubes rather than eat by mouth. This means they do not learn to eat, chew and swallow in the same way that most people do.
- Often learn to avoid eating or drinking. They have not learned that eating can be safe and enjoyable.
- Have trouble learning how to move the mouth for eating.

What are some GI problems that can lead to feeding problems?

There are many GI problems that can lead to feeding problems. They include:

- Gastroesophageal reflux (GERD or GE reflux)
- Constipation (hard, infrequent bowel movements)
- Necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC)
- Short bowel syndrome (SBS)
- Gastroschisis
- Congenital diaphragmatic hernia (CDH)

When can I feed my child?

Your child's doctor and care team will decide:

- When your child is ready and able to eat.
- What foods and drinks are safe for your child.

How can I help my child when he cannot eat?

When your child cannot eat, you can still teach him skills that he will need when he begins to eat. This will also help teach him that not all things around the mouth are painful or scary.

Some tips to use with your child include:

- Give your baby a pacifier to suck on during the day. Be sure to use one during tube feedings.
- Teach him that mealtime can be nice. Eat around the table as a family. Share good news of the day, and make sure that he takes part.
 - Hold your baby in your arms as if he was breast or bottle feeding.
 - Place your older child at the table in a highchair.
- Let your child watch you eat and touch your food.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Feeding your child with GI problems, continued

- Offer your toddler kitchen utensils to play with. Give him wooden or plastic spoons and empty plastic cups.
- Let your child smell foods. This helps keep him from being sensitive to smells.
- Point out the color and shape of foods.
- Let your toddler play with wet or squishy toys. This helps keep him from being sensitive to touch.
- Gently wash your child's face, and brush his teeth or gums each day. Stay positive, and make it fun.

When your child is allowed to eat again:

- Limit distractions during mealtime. Turn off the TV and cell phones.
- Limit mealtimes to 20 minutes. If your child has not eaten in 20 minutes, let him leave the table. If this happens often, call your child's doctor or feeding specialist.
- Do not force your child to eat or drink.
 - If your baby gags on the bottle nipple, do not keep putting it in his mouth.
 - If your child gags or turns away from the spoon, do not keep putting it in his mouth.
 - Instead, give your child a rest. If this happens often, call your child's doctor or feeding specialist. They can give you ideas about how to help your child.
- Teach your child to feed himself if he is old enough.
- Praise your child for any interaction your child has with food.

If you have questions or are concerned about your child's feeding skills, talk with your child's doctor. Or, you may call the Rehabilitation Services department at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at this phone number: _____.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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