



Feeding Milestones: Birth to 3 Years

A Parent's Quick Guide

Every child develops at their own pace. This guide highlights typical feeding milestones. If your child consistently struggles with eating, drinking, or progressing through textures, consult your pediatrician or a pediatric feeding specialist.

Birth–4 Months

Primary Nutrition

- Breast milk and/or infant formula
- Reflexive suck-swallow-breathe pattern
- Feeds every 2–4 hours
- Demonstrates hunger and fullness cues

Typical Skills

- ✓ Coordinates sucking, swallowing, and breathing
- ✓ Turns toward nipple when hungry
- ✓ Gradually develops stronger oral muscles

4–6 Months

Getting Ready for Solids

Signs of Readiness

- ✓ Good head and neck control
- ✓ Sits with support
- ✓ Opens mouth when food approaches
- ✓ Shows interest in family meals
- ✓ Loss of tongue-thrust reflex

Introduce

- Thin purees
- Single-ingredient foods
- Small spoon-fed tastes

6–9 Months

Exploring New Foods

Typical Skills

- ✓ Sits independently
- ✓ Accepts spoon feeding
- ✓ Begins moving food around mouth
- ✓ Starts chewing with gums
- ✓ Picks up food with whole hand (palmar grasp)

Offer

- Purees
- Mashed foods
- Soft, cooked vegetables
- Soft fruits
- Dissolvable finger foods

9–12 Months

Building Independence

Typical Skills

- ✓ Finger feeds independently
- ✓ Developing pincer grasp
- ✓ Drinks from an open or straw cup with assistance
- ✓ Chews soft table foods
- ✓ Enjoys self-feeding

Offer

- Soft table foods
- Small bite-sized pieces
- Protein, fruits, vegetables, grains, and dairy

Remember:

Feeding is more than nutrition—it's about building skills, confidence, and positive family experiences.

12–18 Months

Expanding Variety

Typical Skills

- ✓ Eats most family foods
- ✓ Uses spoon with assistance
- ✓ Drinks from open or straw cup
- ✓ Bites through soft foods
- ✓ Developing rotary chewing

Encourage

- Three meals and 2–3 snacks
- Family meals
- Drinking from cups instead of bottles

18–24 Months

Growing Independence

Typical Skills

- ✓ Uses spoon and fork more independently
- ✓ Chews a variety of textures
- ✓ Drinks from an open cup
- ✓ Tries more foods with encouragement

Focus On

- Self-feeding
- Healthy mealtime routines
- Variety over quantity

2–3 Years

Confident Eaters

Typical Skills

- ✓ Eats a wide variety of family foods
- ✓ Uses utensils independently
- ✓ Drinks from open cup
- ✓ Helps with simple mealtime tasks
- ✓ May become selective (this can be normal)

Encourage

- Family meals
- Consistent meal and snack schedule
- No pressure to "clean the plate"
- Continue offering new foods repeatedly

Healthy Feeding Tips

- ✓ Follow your child's hunger and fullness cues.
- ✓ Offer new foods many times—learning takes practice.
- ✓ Eat together as a family whenever possible.
- ✓ Keep mealtimes calm, positive, and screen-free.
- ✓ Avoid forcing bites or using food as a reward.
- ✓ Let your child explore food with all their senses.

When to Seek Help

Talk with your pediatrician or a pediatric feeding specialist if your child:

- Has difficulty sucking, chewing, or swallowing
- Frequently coughs or chokes during meals
- Refuses entire food groups or textures
- Has prolonged mealtimes (30–45+ minutes)
- Frequently gags or vomits with eating
- Has poor weight gain or growth concerns
- Continues to rely heavily on bottles beyond the recommended transition period
- Experiences significant stress or anxiety around meals