

Top Tips to Support Your Child's Development

Physical Development: Health and Self Care Skills

Teaching your child to use a spoon – activities to support the development of fine motor skills needed to begin using a spoon.



It is important to ensure your child is physically supported at mealtimes; use supportive seating and ensure your child's feet are on the floor/foot rest. This will support your child's stability and upper trunk control, and by doing so will support hand-to-mouth coordination.

It is worth considering that teaching to 'stab' food with a fork and learning to eat with a fork may be an easier skill to teach first for some children.

You may want to ask a Physiotherapist and/or Occupational Therapist for advice and support around positioning or if your child requires specialist seating/equipment. Your child's Speech and Language Therapist will also be able to offer advice around feeding and drinking.

You know your child best, it's important to think about and decide when will be the best time for your child to start practicing to feed themselves. For e.g. at the start of the meal when they are at their most hungry, or for you to do those first few spoonfuls so your child is not desperately hungry and in a calm state ready to try to use a spoon.

1. Begin by giving hand under hand or hand on hand support to teach placement of hand grasp and movements. Hand under hand support will teach placement of hand grasp without restricting your child's movement. Gradually remove the amount of assistance using a Portage 'small steps' approach (e.g. move from hand on hand to hand on wrist, guiding/giving a physical prompt to your child, then hand on elbow, etc.)
2. Start by loading the spoon for your child first and fully support spoon feeding, gradually reducing the amount of physical prompt needed (e.g. from hand on hand support move to wrist support, then move to elbow support, etc.)
3. Use adapted spoons, for example those with larger/rubber handles to assist grip, or use small lightweight spoons from a tea set whilst learning.
4. Use non-slip matting under your child's bowl to keep it steady and prevent any slipping. (Non-slip material can often be found in hardware/kitchen departments; a good source for such materials is sometimes the reduced high street shops, or various outlets online.)
5. Use adapted bowls with raised edges to support your child to scoop food with a spoon.
6. Use favourite foods to begin with to motivate your child, and thicker foods that are more likely to stick to the spoon (for e.g. mashed food, porridge, yoghurt).
7. Provide fine motor activities to support your child develop skills to enable them to hold and use spoons. Try some of the ideas within "*Top Tips: Teaching Your Child to Develop a 'Pincer Grasp'*" or "*Teaching Your Child to Thread*". Other fine motor activities might include; sensory play such as finding small objects/play animals in jelly/sand; sorting coloured buttons into containers; placing pegs in a pegboard.



8. Play games which involve scooping sand/water/ dried food with spoons/utensils into containers/bowls.



9. Make the play sensory using jelly, wet or dry materials and encourage your child to 'dig for treasure' by scooping out hidden toys/animals/objects from one tray into another.

10. Involve your child in cooking and baking, e.g. mixing/scooping with a spoon, moving onto mixing whilst holding a bowl as skills develop.

11. Model feeding dolly / teddy during role play games; have a teddy bears picnic or tea party.



12. Scoop and pour water at bath time, using plastic cups and containers.