

Oral – Motor Feeding Disorder

What is it?

Oral-motor feeding is the coordination, timing and movement of the feeding system. Children who have difficulty with oral feeding, and in turn adequate nutrition, exhibit this disorder. Meals may be exhausting, and eating and drinking may be dangerous, stressful and awkward.

What are the symptoms?

Difficulty with feeding include:

- Problems with the ability to take food into the mouth
- Interfering with the buildup of negative oral pressure during sucking
- Leaking food from the nose during sucking and swallowing
- Inefficient handling of food in the mouth
- Poor coordination and timing of the suck-swallow-breathe sequence
- Exhaustion during and after mealtime
- Gastrointestinal discomfort during mealtime (example: vomiting)
- Sensory modulation and sensory defensiveness throughout feeding

Some children who have oral-motor feeding difficulties have had medical problems that require surgery.

How is it treated?

The speech pathologist has an understanding of biomechanical interrelationship of the head, neck and trunk and recognizes the impact of abnormal muscle tone, compensatory body posturing and patterns of movement that influence oral motor functioning and respiration. Specific goals in oral motor therapy include the handling of food in the mouth in coordination with swallowing and breathing to eliminate choking, gagging and aspiration.

Oral motor treatment emphasizes:

- The function of the muscles of the lips, tongue, palate and pharynx
- Inhibition of abnormal movement
- Facilitation of normal patterns
- Normalization of sensory input on the face and within the oral cavity