



The Role of Occupational Therapy in Addressing Feeding Difficulties in Children with Cerebral Palsy (CP)

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Introduction

- Approximately 70-80% of children with cerebral palsy (CP) have associated feeding difficulties and 44-50% of children with cerebral palsy have drooling and swallowing difficulties. There is a higher prevalence of feeding difficulties for those with more severe forms of CP (Korth & Rendell, 2015).
- Contributing factors to feeding difficulties include motor impairments, dysphagia, trunk instability, and Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD). Nutritional concerns for children with CP have been reported to be as high as 90% (Inan et al., 2017).
- Occupational therapists have the education and skills necessary for treatment of feeding difficulties and play a critical role in helping children with CP develop necessary skills to feed and eat successfully (Barlow & Sullivan, 2021).

Objectives

- This project aims to explore feeding difficulties in children with CP, to investigate evidence-based interventions and strategies to address feeding difficulties, and to develop a resource guide for families of children with CP.

Methods

- A literature review was conducted to explore common feeding difficulties among children with CP, current evaluation processes used by OTPs, and evidence-based strategies utilized by OTPs to address feeding difficulties.
- A resource guide was developed to help provide parents/caregivers with strategies and techniques they can implement into daily routines.

ESTABLISHING A CONSISTENT EATING ROUTINE

One of the best ways to support successful feeding and eating for your child is to develop a consistent routine. Establishing routines can take time, so be patient and persistent. Each child is different, so be sure to stick to a routine that works best for you and your child!

TIPS FOR ESTABLISHING A ROUTINE

- Stick to 3 scheduled meals a day with 1-2 snacks
- Only offer food at the table or physical setting your child eats in
- Aim for mealtime being ~30-40 minutes
- Stay consistent with seating location during feeding
- Consistency is key! Keep mealtime looking and feeling similar to the child each day!



OTHER TIPS TO CONSIDER

A visual support or visual schedule can be beneficial to help your child understand the expectations of mealtime and transition well from other environments to the mealtime environment.



Social stories can also help a child develop a mealtime routine. Social stories can be used to help reinforce expected mealtime behavior

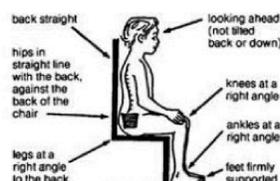
Make feeding fun!!! Cut food into fun shapes using cooking cutters or have the child feed a toy animal to increase motivation with mealtime.



THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIONING

Positioning can have a huge impact on your child's success in feeding and eating. It is important that your child is in a position that support and facilitates the process of eating. If your child is positioned incorrectly, it may cause more difficulty chewing and swallowing. Below are some tips to promote optimal positioning for feeding and eating

TIPS TO PROMOTE PROPER POSITIONING



- Stabilize the neck and trunk as this can affect movement of the tongue, lip, and jaw during feeding
- Neck and trunk movement is affected by the position of the hips, legs, and feet. Feet should be flat and knees should be bent
- A Kid Kart stroller or Rifton chair can be used for extra positioning support

ENVIRONMENTAL MODIFICATIONS AT MEALTIME

Modifying or changing the environment in which a child eats in can be very crucial for seeing success during feeding. If a child is distracted by the environment, he/she may not be attentive to their food. The following strategies are helpful tips to help keep your child engaged during mealtime!

- Stay consistent on the location and time of meals each day
- Limit distractions in the mealtime environment
- Reduce loud noises
- Play soft, soothing music
- Ensure there is good lighting to limit shadows
- Stay consistent with orientation of food and drink; place the food, drink, and utensils in the same spot each day
- Use high contrast bowls and utensils if your child has a visual impairment
- Avoid tv or games during mealtime and engage in mealtime conversation

Conclusions

- Feeding difficulties in children with cerebral palsy can influence health, development, overall well-being, and engagement in desired occupations (Simione et al., 2020).
- Caregiver education on positioning and adaptive utensils can support improvements in mood, participation in occupations, and overall well-being for children with cerebral palsy (Adams et al., 2011).
- Feeding difficulties should be addressed using an interdisciplinary approach consisting of occupational therapists, speech therapists, registered dietitians, physicians, and nutritionists.

References

References can be found by scanning the QR code here:



Acknowledgements

The Blue Ridge Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (Blue Ridge LEND) and this project is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$2,242,875. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit HRSA.gov.