

Helping your child to learn to feed himself

Learning to eat and drink independently will take time and lots of practice for your child. By making some adaptations, or changes to the area where your child eats and/or the utensils (fork or spoon) he uses, you're helping him be independent and build his self-esteem.

Consider the following suggestions to promote independence:

a) Seating arrangements

- Make sure that your child has his own space at the table.
- Use placemats to help him identify his own place. You can stick laminated pictures on the mat, or use a specific color that your child can identify. He will benefit from these visual cues.
- Make sure the seating arrangements accommodate the needs of your child (e.g., offering a preferred spot at the table, sitting next to an adult or peer if help is needed).

b) Positioning

- Your child should be able to sit still with his feet on a stable and firm surface. If necessary, use a step stool to provide support for his feet.
- Use a rubber place mat on the chair to prevent your child from sliding off.
- If your child uses a wheelchair, make sure that there is a clear path for him to access the table and enough space at the table.

c) Recommendations/adaptations for utensils, plates and cups

- If possible, use child-sized plates and utensils.
- If your child has difficulty moving his hands and fingers, he will find it easier to grip a spoon or fork if the handle is enlarged.
- You can make the handle thicker or longer by securing a sponge hair curler or circular foam piece to it.
- A plate with a rim will help to keep the food on the plate while your child is learning to scoop.
- Cups should also be child-sized.
- As your child transitions from drinking from a bottle to drinking from a cup, pour small amounts of liquid into the cup. This will prevent choking and minimize spilling.
- Also, teach your child to hold the cup with both hands, until he is ready to grasp the cup with one hand.



d) Easy steps to promote independence

- At first, you might need to help your child by placing your hand on top of his hand to guide his movements when eating and drinking. Gradually, remove, or minimize your help once your child begins to develop the skills on his own. These strategies are also known as “prompting” and “fading”. See the For More Information box for details.
- The goal is that, eventually, no support will be needed and your child will be eating by himself.