

Let's Talk About...

Feeding Disorder/Difficulty

When a child or baby can't eat or drink, or can't eat and drink enough of the right things to stay healthy, they may have a feeding disorder. The child may be losing weight or having trouble gaining the right amount of weight for their age.

With treatment, eating can become a safer, easier, and happier experience for the child and the family. Treatment can also help a child to be healthier.

What causes feeding disorders?

Feeding disorders (often called feeding difficulties) in children are almost always caused by some other medical problem, including:

- Gastroesophageal reflux (GAS-trow-es-off-a- GEE-all REE-flucks)
- Eosinophilic esophagitis (EE-oh-sin-oh-fil-ik EE-sof-a-jie-tis)
- Other stomach or intestine problems
- Seizures
- Nervous system problems
- Premature birth
- Sensory system problems
- Autism
- Craniofacial syndromes
- Heart or lung problems
- Face and mouth muscle problems
- Problems swallowing certain liquids and food textures

What are the signs that my child may have a feeding disorder?

- Not gaining weight well
- Coughing, choking, or gagging when eating or drinking

- Throwing up often
- Choking on food or drink at one time and not eating again
- Eating and breathing coordination problems during or after eating
- Not eating baby food purees by 8 months old
- Not eating table foods by 12 months old
- Not using a cup by 16 months old
- Eating baby foods at 16 months old
- Avoiding foods with a certain texture or a certain food group (such as fruits and vegetables)
- Taking fewer than 20 kinds of food, especially when they stop eating certain foods and don't replace them with other foods
- Crying or arching at most meals
- Taking more than 30 minutes to eat meals, on a regular basis

Other signs within your family:

- Arguing with your child about food and feeding
- Feeding your child is difficult for everyone
- Eating problems as a parent now or in the past that your child may also have

How will my child be evaluated?

Your child will have a clinical feeding evaluation at a therapy center. The feeding specialist (either a speech-language pathologist or an occupational therapist) will talk with you about:

- The foods your child eats
- Where and when your child eats
- Who feeds your child

The therapist will look at your child's mouth and face and watch your child eat or be fed. By watching children eat, the specialist can learn how they move their mouths, think while eating, and control their bodies. They can also determine a child's general ability to eat. If the therapist thinks your child may not be swallowing safely, they will schedule another evaluation.

How are feeding disorders treated?

After the feeding evaluations, the caregiver may recommend several ways to help your child, including:

- Putting your child in certain safe eating and drinking positions
- Giving your child certain drinks and foods that are safe for them
- Helping your child to eat a wider variety of foods, and drink assorted drinks
- Teaching you and your child safe feeding and drinking skills
- Coordinating services with other medical and therapy professionals

Questions?

If you are concerned your child has a feeding disorder, please call for an appointment with an Intermountain Pediatric Rehabilitation clinical feeding specialist. They work at eight different Outpatient Rehabilitation Department sites:

- **Primary Children's Rehab Bountiful**
280 N. Main St., 2nd Floor
Bountiful, UT 84010
Phone: 801.292.8665
- **Primary Children's Rehab Ogden**
3903 Harrison Blvd., 4th Floor
Ogden, UT 84403
Phone: 801.387.2080

- **Primary Children's Rehab Riverton**
3741 W. 12600 S., Suite 100
Riverton, UT 84065
Phone: 801.571.3081
- **Primary Children's Rehab Taylorsville**
3845 W. 4700 S., 2nd Floor
Taylorsville, UT 84118
Phone: 801.840.4360
- **Pediatric Rehabilitation at Orem Community Hospital**
527 W. 400 N., Suite 2
Orem, UT 84057
Phone: 801.714.3505
- **Intermountain Physical Therapy—Saratoga Springs**
250 E. Crossroads Blvd.
Saratoga Springs, UT 84045
Phone: 801.357.1750
- **Intermountain Physical Therapy—Spanish Fork**
820 Expressway Lane
Spanish Fork, UT 84660
Phone: 801.794.0333
- **Pediatric Rehabilitation at Logan Regional Medical Center**
550 E. 1400 N., Suite W
Logan, UT 84341
Phone: 435.716.6440
- **Pediatric Rehabilitation at Dixie Regional Medical Center**
652 S. Medical Center Drive
St. George, UT 84790
Phone: 435.251.2250
(Located on the lower level of the Health and Performance Center)

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