

Let's Talk About...

Feeding Disorder

What is a feeding disorder?

A feeding disorder is when a baby or child can't eat or drink, or can't eat and drink enough of the right things to stay healthy for more than 2 weeks. When this happens, the child may lose weight or have trouble gaining the right amount of weight for their age.

What causes a feeding disorder?

Feeding disorders (often called **feeding difficulties**) are almost always caused by some other medical problem, including gastrointestinal (GI) problems like GERD, or gastroesophageal [gas-trow-eh-soff-uh-GEE-ul] reflux [REE-flucks] disease, eosinophilic [ee-oh-sin-oh-FILL-ik] esophagitis [eh-sof-a-JIE-tis], or other stomach or intestinal problems.

Children with a feeding disorder may also have nervous system or neurological problems, such as:

- Seizures
- Sensory problems
- Muscle problems with the face and mouth

Or, it may be tied to:

- Premature birth
- Autism
- Craniofacial [kray-nee-oh-FAY-shul] syndromes
- Heart or lung problems
- Problems swallowing certain liquids and food textures
- Genetic syndromes

Feeding disorders may also be influenced by the child's environment.



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

Signs that your child might have a feeding disorder include not gaining weight well, or digestive issues, such as throwing up often. Other signs include:

- Choking on food or drink once and then not eating again
- Not able to time eating and breathing during or after eating, causing choking, coughing, or gagging.
- Avoiding foods with a certain texture or a certain food group (such as fruits and vegetables)
- Eating fewer than 20 kinds of food, especially if they stop eating certain foods and don't replace them with other foods
- Crying or arching at most meals

Other signs may include a failure to meet certain developmental goals, such as:

- Not eating baby food purees by 8 months old
- Not eating formed table foods by 12 months old
- Not using a cup by 16 months old
- Eating only baby foods at 16 months old
- Taking more than 30 minutes to eat meals, on a regular basis
- Not able to self feed finger foods by 12 months.
- Not able to use eating utensils by 18 months.

Signs that your child may have a feeding disorder also include stresses on the family, such as:

- Arguing with your child about food and feeding
- Feeding your child is difficult for everyone
- Child refusing to eat
- A parent's feeding problem, now or in the past, that your child may also have.

How will my child's feeding disorder be tested?

Your child will have a clinical feeding evaluation at a therapy center with a speech-language pathologist or an occupational therapist. The therapist will talk with you about your child's medical history and then discuss:

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

The therapist will also 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 tests, the therapist 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 drinks
- Teaching you and your child safe feeding and drinking skills
- Coordinating services with other medical and therapy professionals

Where can I learn more?

If you are concerned your child has a feeding disorder, please call for an appointment with an Intermountain Pediatric Rehabilitation clinical feeding specialist at one of the following locations:

Primary Children's Rehab Bountiful

280 N. Main St., 2nd Floor

Bountiful, UT 84010

Phone: 833-577-3422

Primary Children's Rehab Layton

201 W. Layton Parkway, 3rd floor

Layton, UT 84041

Phone: 833-577-3422

Primary Children's Rehab Riverton

3741 W. 12600 S., Suite 100

Riverton, UT 84065

Phone: 833-577-3422

Primary Children's Rehab Taylorsville

3845 W. 4700 S., 2nd Floor

Taylorsville, UT 84118

Phone: 833-577-3422

Pediatric Rehabilitation at Orem Community Hospital

527 W. 400 N., Suite 2

Orem, UT 84057

Phone: 801-714-3505

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)

Primary Children’s Rehab TOSH

5770 S. Fashion Blvd, Building 5, Suite 210

Murray, UT 84107

Phone: 833-577-3422

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