

Helping your Child Learn to Bite and Chew

How do I know my child is ready to bite and chew foods?

When your child:

- Is at least 8 months old
- Shows interest in food (watches you eat, leans forward, reaches for food)
- Can sit and hold their head up for snacks and meals
- Opens their mouth for the spoon or food
- Moves their mouth up and down to eat
- Can eat spoonfuls of smooth or lumpy foods
- Is starting to move their tongue side to side in their mouth

Learning to bite and chew

First steps:

- Encourage your child to bring toys and hands to their mouth to explore with their tongue
- Be patient, learning how to bite and chew takes time
- Plan to eat meals and snacks together
- Always have eyes on your child while they are eating
- It is best for your child to sit to eat (for tips on choosing the best seat for your child, see “Purchasing a Highchair” handout on the PEAS website (peas.ahs.ca))
- Keep mealtimes about eating (turn screens off)
- Put food on the table where your child can reach it
- Do not worry about how much your child eats while they are learning
- Show your child how to smell, touch, and taste new foods and encourage them to do the same
- Your child’s likes and dislikes with food may change often, and that is okay



At meals and snacks

- You decide *what* foods to offer, *when* and *where* to offer foods
- Your child decides *whether* to eat, *which* of the foods to eat, and *how much* to eat
- Think of meals and snacks as times to come together and enjoy foods

Helping your Child Learn to Bite and Chew | 2

Learning how to chew

What to offer:

- Offer different kinds of food
- Provide finger foods your child can pick up
- Start with foods that melt easily in your mouth such as toddler puffs or yogurt melts
- Next try soft, moist, easy to chew foods such as canned fruits, cooked vegetables and soft meats
- Cut food into small pieces or strips
- Show your child how to chew and move food around the mouth (biting from the side, at the front, moving food onto your teeth with your tongue)

Working on biting:

- Use long thin strips, sticks or wedges your child can hold and bite
- Start with softer, easy to bite and chew foods
- Make sure your child bites off a piece that is small enough to chew
- Show your child how you chew with your jaw moving in circles
- Your child may spit out foods while they are learning, that's ok

Additional resources:

Access the following resources and more on the PEAS Website (peas.ahs.ca)

- If you are worried about your child's feeding, you can use the "[Is Feeding a Struggle](#)" questionnaire to better understand and identify any areas of concern
- Gagging in Babies and Children [handout](#)
- Food Textures for Children [handout](#)

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at **811**.

This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction, or treatment. If you have questions, talk with your doctor or appropriate healthcare provider.

peas.ahs.ca

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International license. © 2022 Alberta Health Services - Maternal Newborn Child & Youth SCN

