



Understanding FEDS



Look out for coughing, choking, texture refusal or mealtimes over 30 minutes.
Book a feeding assessment today.



Every bite
matters.



Sea S.A.L.T.
Speech and Language Therapy

Understanding Paediatric Feeding, Eating, Drinking, and Swallowing

For many families, mealtimes are a beautiful opportunity to connect, share stories and bond. However, for some children and parents, breakfast, lunch and dinner can feel like a daily marathon.

When a child struggles with eating or drinking, it often falls under the umbrella of Paediatric Feeding, Eating, Drinking and Swallowing (FEDS). As Speech Pathologists, our goal is to ensure that every child can eat and drink safely, efficiently and happily.

Let's break down what FEDS actually means and when it might be time to seek professional support.

What is FEDS?

While they sound similar, feeding and swallowing are actually two distinct parts of the mealtime experience.

- **Feeding:** This is the entire process of getting food or liquid into the mouth. It includes a child's behaviour, their ability to pick up food, bring it to their mouth, chew it and organise it. It also heavily involves sensory processing such as how a food looks, smells, feels and tastes.
- **Swallowing:** This is the physical and physiological process of moving food or drink from the mouth, down the throat and safely into the stomach without it entering the airway.

Common Signs of Feeding or Swallowing Difficulties

It can be difficult to know if a child is just going through a phase of "picky eating" or if there is an underlying feeding or swallowing challenge. Here are some key indicators that a child might benefit from an assessment:

Signs of Swallowing Difficulties (Safety Concerns)

- Coughing, choking or gagging during meals or drinks.
- A "wet" or gurgly sounding voice during or after eating.
- Frequent chest infections or unexplained fevers.
- Congestion or watery eyes while eating.

Signs of Feeding Difficulties (Sensory/Behavioural Concerns)

- Extreme distress or crying when presented with food.
- Avoiding entire textures, e.g. only eating smooth purees, refusing crunchy foods.
- An extremely limited diet where the child accepts fewer than 20 distinct foods.
- Inability to transition to age-appropriate textures, e.g. struggling with finger foods.
- Mealtimes regularly lasting longer than 30 minutes.

How a Speech Pathologist Can Help

Speech Pathologists are trained to look at the whole picture of paediatric feeding. Depending on your child's needs, support might include:

- **Oral-Motor Therapy:** Helping your child strengthen the muscles in their lips, tongue and jaw to chew and manage food safely.
- **Sensory Desensitisation:** Gradually introducing new textures, smells and tastes in a playful, low-pressure way.
- **Mealtime Strategies:** Providing practical advice on positioning, specialised cups/utensils and structuring mealtimes to reduce stress for the whole family.

If you have concerns about your child's feeding or swallowing development, reaching out to a qualified Speech Pathologist for a comprehensive assessment is the best first step. Every child deserves to experience safe, happy and connected mealtimes!



Get in touch with us today to book your appointment!

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