

How to facilitate your young children to feed themselves? (From 6 to 24 months)

After 6 months of age, babies want to have some control of their environment. With better hand-eye coordination, babies now reach out for spoons and foods during mealtimes. This is the right time to let them learn to feed themselves.

How do young children feed themselves?

1. At the age of 8 months, children pick up food and eat. They also grab spoon and put it in mouth;
2. About 1 year old, children dip spoon in food and then put spoon in mouth;
3. Gradually, children manage to scoop the food with a spoon. At the same time, they are capable of using a fork;
4. At around 2 years of age, they are proficient with spoons;
5. Through practicing, they master the skills and manage to use spoon without spilling.

Self-feeding can be messy; but this is an important part of your child's development. Children learn by trial and error. If parents offer little opportunities for children to feed themselves for the sake of tidiness, it would hinder them acquiring the age appropriate feeding skills.

You should pay attention to the followings:

1. Give your baby cutlery that is safe and easy-to-use;
2. Clean his or her hands and put on the bib before feeding;
3. Take away all objects that may cause harm or may distract him or her from the dining table. Serve foods at suitable temperatures;
4. Let your baby finger feed himself:
 - Provide food pieces that are big enough for your baby to hold (such as 7-10 cm long softly cooked vegetable stalk, sweet potato, finger biscuit, sliced toast);
5. If your baby grabs your feeding spoon during feeding time, let him take it and you feed him with another one;
6. Praise your baby when he feeds himself;
7. Avoid wiping/cleaning your baby's hands too often during mealtimes, this may disturb his interest in eating.



How to help young children learn to eat from a spoon?

Using two-spoon approach, you can feed your baby efficiently while he or she is feeding themselves:

- Give your baby a spoon while you feed him with another. When appropriate, put food on his spoon and let him feed himself with it;
- Another way is to give your baby an empty spoon, then exchange it with a spoon which is filled with food and let him feed himself. Keep repeating as you fill the spoon, he feeds himself;
- If your baby cannot scoop up food, you can put the food on his spoon by using another spoon or make the food into smaller pieces so that he can scoop the food more easily;
- Hold the bowl for your baby when needed;
- At the beginning, self-feeding is messy and foods may end up everywhere. But be relax and patient. With more practices, he will be able to eat without your help;
- Stay with your baby and supervise him whenever he eats.

How to help young children use a fork?

- Helping your child using a fork is similar to that using a spoon. Choose a fork with short and dull tines. Pay attention to both texture and size of the foods. Foods should be soft, likes banana or kiwi. Cut the foods smaller (about 1 cm) if your baby's front teeth have not come through. It is fun for your baby to eat diced fruits or macaroni by using fork;
- Show your baby how to use a fork. Let him observe and then allow him to practice;
- Your baby may have troubles in getting the food with fork because the food moves; you could help him by keeping the food in position.