

SUPPORTING CHEWING SKILLS: LATERALIZATION AND MUNCHING

Some children prefer foods that can be easily mashed with the tongue and swallowed without chewing, which is often seen when chewing skills are still developing. The goal is to gradually help your child develop lateralization, which is the ability to move food from side to side in the mouth, along with up and down chewing movements, in a safe and comfortable way.

Start with Safe Food Textures

- Use soft foods that melt or break down easily (for example, soft cooked vegetables, ripe fruit, soft pasta)
- Offer small, controlled bite sizes to reduce choking risk and support early chewing success
- Use meltable foods (for example, baby puffs or similar textures) as a safe bridge toward chewing skills

Build Mouth Awareness Before Chewing

- Let your child explore foods with their lips and tongue without pressure
- Offer foods on different areas of the mouth, including the left and right side
- Model slow chewing so your child can watch how food moves in the mouth

Support Lateralization (Moving Food Side to Side)

- Place small pieces of soft food on one side of the mouth using a spoon or by guiding your child's hand
- Alternate sides during the meal (left side then right side, or vice versa). This helps build coordination for moving food across the tongue and toward the chewing surface
- Use simple language such as "let's try this side"

Teach Munching (Up and Down Chewing Motion)

- Offer soft foods that provide gentle resistance (for example, banana, soft crackers, well cooked pasta, soft vegetables)



- These textures help practice up and down jaw movements safely
- Model slow, exaggerated chewing movements during meals

Practice Chewing Safely Outside of Meals

- Offer safe chewing practice with teething toys or large, wide pieces of food (for example, a thick carrot, a wide strip of bell pepper, or a mango pit)
- Always supervise closely and choose items that are firm enough to be handled safely and not easily bitten into pieces, reducing choking risk

Model Calm, Low-Pressure Mealtimes

- Eat together and model slow, natural chewing so your child can watch and copy
- Keep instructions simple and consistent (for example, “food to the side,” “chew up and down”)
- Keep mealtimes relaxed, predictable, and unhurried as much as possible
- Allow your child to spit food out if needed while learning
- Do not force chewing, bites, or swallowing
- Offer repeated exposure to the same foods over time without pressure
- Praise effort and exploration with food rather than amount eaten

Additional Resources

- [Start Solids with Confidence - Solid Starts](#)
 - You can download the paid app, or follow along for free tips on their website and social media, such as Instagram
- [Feeding According to Developmental Level – Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital](#)