



# Developmental Steps to Self-Feeding in Young Children



Self-feeding skills are important for becoming a healthy and independent eater. Learn how you can support healthy development through early childhood.

Steps to Self-Feeding	Before Age 1	Ages 1-2	Ages 2-3	Ages 4-5
<b>Self-feeding skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holds a cup, spoon<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Picks up a cracker or cookie<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Can reach for and accept food when caregiver offers<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Can learn signs for “more” and “all done”<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drinks from a cup with less spilling<sup>3,4</sup></li> <li>• Uses a straw<sup>3,4</sup></li> <li>• Scoops food and brings to mouth<sup>2,3</sup></li> <li>• Takes apples or a piece of bread off of a plate<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Uses fingers to self-feed soft chopped bananas<sup>5</sup></li> <li>• Begins to eat with utensils</li> <li>• Serves themselves with a scoop with assistance<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drinks from a cup (no lid) without spilling (most of the times)<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Serves while standing up<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Can tell caregiver how much by saying “when” as food is served</li> <li>• Learns to take turns at family style meals</li> <li>• Stabs food with fork<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Uses spoon without spilling<sup>2,3</sup></li> <li>• Pour drinks with assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serves with a serving spoon</li> <li>• Counts number of spoonfuls</li> <li>• Uses a dull knife with help</li> </ul>
<b>Foods that support self-feeding skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to grasp bites<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Try:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Dry cereal, macaroni, avocado</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foods that “stick” on spoons<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Try:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Yogurt, refried beans, oatmeal, macaroni and cheese</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to “fork” foods<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Try:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Pancake pieces, cooked broccoli, tofu or chicken cubes</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Easy to pour “thick” liquids<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Try:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Smoothies, milkshakes</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to cut “soft” foods</li> <li>• Try:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Cooked carrot “logs”, bananas, pancakes</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Eating tools that support self-feeding skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean flat surface for small bites of foods<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short handle forks<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Spoons with short wide handles<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Small plates with rims</li> <li>• Small, deeper bowls for scooping<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Shorter cups with handles<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taller cups<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Small serving bowls and plates to pass around the table at meals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small pitchers with spout</li> <li>• Dull table knives</li> </ul>
<b>Practice through play</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bringing hands and safe toys to mouth<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Transferring toys from one hand to another<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Putting small objects through holes and into containers<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Holding spoons at meals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shoveling sand or dried beans<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Using a spoon to scoop marshmallows</li> <li>• Pouring water into containers<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Pouring in bathtub and at water table using stacking or measuring cups<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playing with play dough- scooping, stabbing, cutting, and pinching pieces<sup>5,6</sup></li> <li>• Using imaginary play to take turns at family meals (imaginary tea parties or picnics)<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping in kitchen               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Washing fruits and veggies</li> <li>◦ Measuring ingredients</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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 3. Carruth, B.R., Skinner J. D. (2002). Feeding Behaviors and Other Motor Development in Health Children (2-24 Months). *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, 21 (2): 88-96.  
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