

Oral Motor Developmental Milestones

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What is oral motor development?



Oral motor development refers to the use and function of the lips, tongue, jaw, teeth, and the hard and soft palates. The movement and coordination of these structures is very important in speech production, safe swallowing, and consuming various food textures. Normal oral motor development begins prior to birth and continues beyond age three. By age four, most children safely consume solids and liquids without choking.

The milestones below are typically observable through these particular ages. Consult your doctor or pediatrician before introducing new foods to your baby. He/She will guide you in selecting appropriate foods and feeding utensils. Use the following list of developmental milestones to monitor your child's progress toward oral motor and swallowing development.

Before birth, the baby:

- Begins to develop the sucking and suckling reflexes around 36 weeks.

At birth to three months, the baby:

- Demonstrates many reflexes to protect his/her airway.
- Responds to stimulation in and around the mouth.
- Turns his/her head toward the nipple when the caregiver strokes the cheeks. This signals that the baby is ready to eat.
- Consumes breast milk or formula using a nipple.
- Coordinates his/her breath with two to three sucks of liquid before swallowing and breathing.

At three to six months, the baby:

- Brings both hands up to clasp the bottle but needs assistance holding it.
- Consumes rice cereal or pureed fruit and pureed vegetable baby foods.
- Eats from a small infant/toddler spoon during feeding.

At six to nine months, the baby:

- Holds the bottle independently.
- Cleans the spoon with his/her upper lip.
- Eats pureed meats and a variety of pureed baby foods.