

Collaborative Treatment of Pediatric Feeding Disorder

Feeding requires a remarkable level of coordination. It is one of the most complex and physically demanding tasks an infant must master in the early weeks and months of life. Each swallow depends on the precise interaction of 26 muscles and 6 cranial nerves working together to safely transport food and liquid. When any part of this system is delayed, disorganized, or not functioning optimally, infants and children may struggle with eating and drinking.

[Pediatric Feeding Disorder \(PFD\)](#) is defined as oral intake that does not meet age-based expectations. It is associated with medical, nutritional, feeding skill, and/or psychosocial challenges. Current estimates indicate that more than 1 in 37 children under the age of five in the United States are affected each year. For these children, feeding may be uncomfortable, scary, or unmanageable. This can interfere with adequate nutrition, growth, development, and overall health.

Because feeding involves posture, motor skills, sensory regulation, oral-motor coordination, communication, and emotional readiness, a multidisciplinary approach is essential. Here's a quick overview of the unique role each therapeutic discipline plays and the specialized approaches they may use to help children develop safe and positive feeding skills.

Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) and Feeding Disorders

Speech-language pathologists typically lead treatment when a child's feeding challenges involve:

- Oral-motor coordination
- Swallowing safety
- Sensory aversion affecting oral intake
- Transitioning to new textures
- Communication around eating

SLPs often assess swallowing function, provide strategies to improve oral motor control, and coordinate with medical teams when aspiration or dysphagia is a concern.

Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Feeding Disorders

Occupational therapy focuses on how feeding fits into a child's daily routines and how sensory, motor, behavioral, and environmental factors influence mealtime success. Their work may include:

- Improving fine motor skills for self-feeding
- Sensory regulation to help a child tolerate textures, smells, and sounds
- Seating, positioning, and adaptive equipment
- Reducing mealtime stress and promoting independence

Physical Therapists (PTs) and Feeding Disorders

Physical therapy addresses the postural and biomechanical foundation required for safe feeding. This includes:

- Head/trunk control
- Core stability
- Seating modifications
- Developing gross motor alignment for optimal swallowing

Children who have difficulty maintaining posture at the table or who fatigue easily often benefit significantly from PT support.

Feeding Courses at Education Resources, Inc.

Education Resources, Inc. offers exceptional continuing education for OTs, PTs, and SLPs, supporting professionals at all experience levels, from new graduates building foundational skills to advanced clinicians looking to deepen their knowledge and elevate their practice.

ON-DEMAND COURSES:

Pediatric Feeding and Swallowing Disorders: Bridging the Clinical Decision-Making Gaps with Interactive Case Studies

[Anais Villaluna, Dana Kizer](#)

Upcoming LIVE WEBINARS:

Beyond the Oropharynx: Integrating Esophageal Knowledge into Pediatric Feeding Practice

[Amanda Adsett](#)

Treatment Strategies for the Improvement of Oral, Pharyngeal, Feeding/Swallowing, and Respiratory Coordination Function: The Child with Neuromuscular Involvement

[Rona Alexander](#)

Infants and Children with Complex Feeding and Swallowing Disorders: Challenging Decision Making

[Joan Arvedson](#)

Feeding Challenges: Sensory vs. Structural vs. Experience

[Danielle Carey](#)

Feeding Tiny Humans: Strategies for “Typical” to Troubled Premature and Medically Complex Babies

[Shanna Semmler](#)

Feeding and Swallowing Disorders in Infancy: Assessment and Management

[Lynn Wolf, Robin Glass](#)

Sources:

[What is Pediatric Feeding Disorder? - Feeding Matters](#)