

What to Expect: Feeding Therapy

What is a feeding disorder?

A feeding disorder is identified when a child is unable or refuses to eat or drink sufficient quantities' to maintain nutritional status. Typically, children with feeding difficulties exhibit strong preferences for certain food (by type, texture, color and/or packaging) and consume a narrower quantity of food when compared with their peers. Additionally, mealtimes are often difficult due to elevated rates of disruptive behavior such as crying, gagging, vomiting, and throwing things when presented with non-preferred foods. Common signs and symptoms of a feeding disorder include:

- Poor weight gain
- Feeding Tube Dependence
- Bottle or formula dependence
- Mealtime tantrums, or mealtimes exceeding 40 minutes
- Distress and anxiety with new foods
- Inability to increase textures
- Inability or refusal to feed oneself
- Extreme pickiness (eating fewer than 12 foods)

What is feeding therapy?

Feeding therapy is a specialized approach designed to address many concerns surrounding food refusal, selectivity and inappropriate mealtime behaviors. Feeding therapy provides a systematic, behavioral approach to addressing all of these concerns.

Treatment needs are identified after the completion of a thorough assessment including: client observation with food presentation, review of dietary journal, and parent/caregiver interview. After all physiological concerns (gastroesophageal and metabolic abnormalities, and reflux) and oral motor deficiencies or swallowing deficiencies have been ruled out by medical professionals and/or speech and language pathologists, feeding treatment plans are written to address the maladaptive behaviors and skill deficits that remain.

What can I expect to happen during a feeding evaluation?

The interdisciplinary team feeding team: behavioral psychology, occupational/speech therapy, and nursing will interview you regarding your current feeding practices as well as your child's feeding history. Typical feeding evaluations last about one and a half hours. Additionally, the team will observe your child eating a typical meal. The team will provide recommendations as to whether you child is a candidate for our treatment program. When you and your child are approved by insurance ("cleared") to start the program, someone from the support service team will call you to inform you of potential start dates for treatment. Please keep in mind that the start dates are subject to change. The team will keep in contact with you to let you know when your child's start date is confirmed. Once your start date is confirmed, a *primary therapist* will be assigned to your child's case. This primary therapist is part of the interdisciplinary feeding team and will be your primary contact for information regarding your child's treatment while in the program. In the feeding program a behavioral psychologist and a behavioral therapist will provide services to you and your child; other team members are available on an as needed basis.

What to expect during your child's treatment:

Each child is different and the treatments developed in our program are individualized to *your* child. There is no "typical" treatment or "typical course". Each child progresses at his or her own pace. Some children begin eating within a few days of admission, other children progress more slowly and it takes many weeks before they eat. Your child's progress will depend on a number of factors, including but not limited to (a) your child's feeding history; (b) the extent to which your child has oral motor issues which impact his or her feeding; and (c) the extent to which your child has ongoing or emerging medical issues (e.g. vomiting). Our method is to use your child's behavior as a guide to tell us what to do next. That is why we record your child's behaviors during meals carefully. We will talk to you extensively about your child's data. Remember, your child is not able to describe in words why he or she does not eat. Therefore, it is your child's behavior that guides us to the problem. Never underestimate the importance if the data in helping us develop a good treatment for your child. We care about your child, that is why we use data. Using data to make treatment decisions is the BEST and MOST EFFICIENT way to help your child.

When are feeding protocols transitioned to other settings:

Caregiver training during treatment is required and essential to the success of the program. You will be taught not only how to successfully implement the *feeding protocol*, but you will also be taught general child behavior management techniques. During your visits, you will learn these techniques and how to apply them in different settings. In addition, you may be given reading and even some homework assignments that will help you understand better what you are learning in the training sessions. These techniques are the basic building blocks of our approach to the feeding situations. Once you have success in the clinic, we will generalize to other settings such as home and community.

What to expect after your child's treatment:

Prior to discharge from our treatment program, a follow up schedule will be set up between you and your primary therapist. Our follow up services are designed for the following purposes:

- To ensure that the feeding protocol is being implemented correctly at home and in other environments (I,e, school).
- To ensure that the feeding program is effective in these other environments.
- To provide additional training to whomever may interact with the child in a feeding capacity (i.e. extended family members or caretakers: grandmother, aunt, uncle or baby-sitter). School training is sometimes necessary for teachers, aides, and occupational and speech therapists.
- To continue to make progress in feeding and/or other areas.

The ultimate goal for the program (i.e, treatment, caregiver training, and community follow-up) is to help your child become an age typical feeder. Continued services and implementation of procedures is the best way to achieve this goal.

Who we are:

Keystone is one of the only facilities in Florida to offer empirically supported outpatient feeding treatment to children with feeding disorders. We provide interdisciplinary assessment and treatment of children from infancy to age eighteen. Our team of professionals includes; psychologists, board certified behavior analysts, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, and a registered nurse specializing in nutrition.

How do I get my child started in feeding therapy?

You can obtain for a 'Feeding Intake Questionnaire and Diary' from the receptionist and return it completed to the clinic. You may also speak with your child's current therapist at Keystone Behavioral Pediatrics or email the clinic at info@keystonebehavioral.com