Resources

For more information on Health Care Plans, scan the QR code or visit: bit.ly/3yzQNZf

For questions or scheduling, please contact the Anna and John J. Sie Center for Down Syndrome at 720-777-6750

SIE CENTER FOR DOWN SYDROME

Feeding and Swallowing Needs at School

For children with special healthcare needs, adjusting to school can be hard. For many families, this is the first time your child will be away from home for long periods during the day. One common concern families have is if their child has trouble with feeding or swallowing (dysphagia) and finding ways to keep them safe at school. This guide is here to help you create a plan for your child's food and drink needs at school so staff can follow the same care instructions you use at home.

Children's Hospital Colorado

Where to start?

Before your child starts at a new school, or after a change in their feeding/swallowing status, it can be helpful to have a plan in place. This can include learning about mealtimes and schedules at school to make sure everything is ready at home.

Get to know the school's support structure around meal and snack times

Here are some important things to ask when getting your child ready for school:

- Does your team have any experience with students on modified diets?
- What does staff training on health care needs look like?
- What is the staff ratio during mealtimes?
- Are there multiple times during the day when students have access to food or drinks?
- Is there a drinking fountain readily available?

Set your child up for success

Pack S.M.A.R.T.

- **S**ize matters: Is it helpful to cut food into smaller pieces?
- **M**otor skills: Can your child open the food package? Or use utensils with minimal support?
- **A**bilities: Does this food align with your child's current self-feeding and oral motor skills?
- **R**eliable: Is this a food that your child is confident eating at home?
- **T**ime frame: Can your child meet their intake needs with this food in the allotted time?

Make a Plan

Students with Down syndrome usually need supports and services through an Individual Education Plan (IEP). An IEP is a legal document that outlines supports and services for students, ages 3-21, so they can take part in school and have access to learning. To start the IEP process, ask your child's school to schedule an IEP meeting with you, your child's team, including the school nurse.

While there are many parts to an IEP, the following sections are commonly used to support the feeding and swallowing needs of a student.

Health Care Plan

A Health Care Plan is under the Considerations of Special Factors section. It is used when a student has a medical diagnosis such as dysphagia. It requires an outline of what is needed from a doctor or specialist. A Health Care Plan is managed by the school nurse, who works to train staff who work with that student. A Health Care Plan could include:

- Aspiration (taking food/drink into the lungs)/Dysphagia Support:
    - Thickened Liquids: training staff in how to thicken liquids and knowing where "hidden liquids" exist
    - Prevention of child drinking non-thickened liquids: block access to drinking fountains, not allowing to take a school milk
    - Outlining what aspiration can look like and what to do when it happens
- Supervision of mealtimes above and beyond when there is medical acknowledgement of a high risk for choking on solid foods
- Training for staff on G-tube feedings

Accommodations

Accommodations are supports that allow the student to take part in school. These can look like:

- Reminders or cues to use utensils, start eating, pace child to prevent over stuffing
- Additional access to snacks or personal water bottle
- Extended time for feeding opportunities
- Help with opening packages
- Offering only food and drinks from home
- Letting caregivers know about classroom celebrations where food will be involved

Services

At times, other staff, such as a paraprofessional, may be needed to support your child. Other times, an Occupational Therapist (OT) or Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) can include feeding needs into therapy sessions. This can only happen when it is determined a necessity so that the student may fully participate in classroom activities. An SLP or OT can also make recommendations or include adaptive feeding equipment, such as modified utensils or seating to support an appropriate position. When these things are added to a child's program, they are considered Assistive Technology, and should also be included in the IEP.