

Cutlery & Self Feeding

Strategies to try:

- Let your child play with food with their hands and/or a spoon.
- Don't worry about mess and spills, try a long sleeved apron or a plastic mat on the floor to catch spills.
- Cutlery skills can be practiced at snack times and during play with play dough rather than at meal times.
- Chunky cutlery can be easier to hold.
- Use non-slip matting to stop the bowl or plate sliding about.
- Use bowl or plate with a lip.
- It is easier to practice these skills when sitting in a high chair or at a table.

Children first start exploring with food at the early stages of weaning where they might play with yoghurt or soup on their tray. They may then show interest in using their hands to eat finger foods and take the spoon from the adult when being fed. Moving on to using a fork for picking up foods and a fork and spoon for scooping. We would not expect children under 6 or 7 to effectively use a knife and fork together.



- Eat together when you can as children learn from copying others.
- Encourage your child to play and explore with foods, pick up foods and taste it but don't worry if they don't eat much of it.
- Use 2 spoons so that the child has one to hold and you have one during the meal, you can swap them throughout. Try different sizes of spoons. Give your child bread, crackers or bread sticks to dip into foods.
- Independent dipping with a spoon in to foods that will stick to the spoon, like yoghurt, soup, custard helps learn spoon skills. Don't worry at this stage if they turn the spoon over, this is part of learning.
- Practice scooping with a spoon using a bowl. Choose sticky foods first like mashed potato, then thicker consistency meals like macaroni or mince and potatoes mixed together. Move onto runnier textures when they are having more success.
- Use a fork to stab easy to pick up items like pre-chopped soft fruit, chicken, chips or sausages.
- Use a fork to scoop sticky foods like mashed potato, sticky rice.
- Learn to use a knife on its own by using a hand to hold and the knife to cut soft foods like banana, boiled potato, bread or in play with play dough, cookie dough or similar.
- Use a knife and fork to cut up softer foods like fish fingers, gradually reduce the amount of assistance you offer. Keep practicing.
- Practice cutting more difficult textures before expecting full independence.
- For spreading, practice with soft spreads on to harder foods like crackers before moving on to spreading on to bread with more complex textures.

