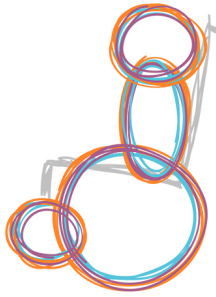


Possible ways to help with feeding issues in children with Cerebral Palsy

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Summary

Most kids with Cerebral Palsy have trouble eating, especially as infants and young children. We need to better understand the best ways of dealing with these problems. Unfortunately, there hasn't been enough thorough research. The research that has been done found five different ways of addressing feeding issues: (1) doing exercises to strengthen the muscles needed to eat and reduce unhelpful reflexes, (2) using certain positions (such as a supported recline or one that stabilizes the neck and body), (3) using soft rather than solid food, (4) using an oral appliance such as the Innsbruck Sensorimotor Activator and Regulator, and (5) using a feeding device. There is some evidence that positioning and offering soft food can speed up feeding and make it safer and that using an oral appliance or doing exercises can help with sensorimotor skills. But because each child and their feeding issues are unique and there hasn't been very much research it is impossible to make a general recommendation.

About this study

This study aimed to evaluate the different feeding interventions for children with Cerebral Palsy by reviewing all the studies published on the subject. The authors made use of a structured review strategy in order to determine which papers to include. They searched 12 databases for relevant articles and then examined the methodology of each to determine which were good enough to be included in their review. A total of 21 studies were reviewed and reviewers gave more weight to the findings of studies with more rigorous methodologies.

What families should know

Most children with Cerebral Palsy have feeding issues. This can be a problem for a lot of reasons; in the short term there is an increased risk of choking and over the long term ongoing feeding issues can lead to children being underweight and undernourished. Being able to eat with others is also socially important and being able to eat without help is important for later independence.

It is also important to recognize that feeding issues can add to an already increased burden of care, and they can be stressful and time consuming.

Every child is different and so are their feeding issues, so one solution will not work for everybody. While there has not been enough research to draw certain conclusions there is some evidence that things like mashing food, changing the child's position, or doing special exercises might help.

What practitioners should know

Most children with Cerebral Palsy have feeding issues. These can increase the risks of aspiration and undernourishment. Doctors should be sure to ask about feeding issues in order to assess whether caloric supplementation and/or a feeding intervention is necessary. Different feeding issues require different types of interventions and the research on effective interventions is currently insufficient. However, there is some evidence to suggest that doing sensory motor exercises, special positioning, giving soft food, and/or using an oral appliance might help speed up feeding and decrease the risk of aspiration.

Reference

Snider L, Majnemer A, Darsaklis V. Feeding Interventions for Children With Cerebral Palsy: A Review of the Evidence. *Physical & Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics* 2011;31:58-77.

Link to article : <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20950250>