

EATING & TALKING: What's the connection?

Learning to talk

- Hearing your child's first sounds and words is an exciting part of being a parent, but did you know that what you feed your child can influence this part of their learning?
- Talking and listening to your baby is really important, but building strong speech muscles is also part of their learning.
- Every child is different – and some are more focused on 'walking' than 'talking', but there are some things that you can do to help your baby build strong muscles for speech.

Introducing Solid food

- Around 4-6 months of age, baby is ready to try pureed, smooth foods, but they will still rely on milk for most of their nutrition.
- The muscles used for sucking, chewing, biting and licking are also the muscles used for making speech sounds. By about 8 months, your baby is showing an interest in family foods and can cope with some lumps and firmer textures.
- Biting and chewing help strengthen tongue and jaw muscles. Sounds like t, k, d, g are some of the early sounds you may hear.
- Drinking with a straw and from a cup will also help with lip closure – for sounds like p, b, and m.
- A delay in introducing different textures as your child develops, can lead to fussy eating patterns as well as delayed muscle and speech development.

What can I do?

- Your baby's physical development and motor milestones will indicate his readiness for new foods and textures.
- Make sure baby can sit up and has good head control, before offering firmer, chewable food types.
- Sensory processing is also involved in eating – as new tastes and textures are experienced. One new thing at a time is often a good idea.
- Check with your Child & Family Health nurse, Speech Pathologist or GP if you have concerns about your child's development in this area.

Here are some useful resources for more information:

<http://www.essentialbaby.com.au/baby/baby-food/why-chewing-is-important-for-speech-development-20110324-1c8of>

<https://pathways.org/> 'Growth & Development'

