

UTENSIL USE

What is it?

Learning to use a fork and spoon is a challenging and entertaining milestone for children. Learning to use utensils takes time, patience and lot of practice.

How can I help the child?

The following are some strategies that may assist your child to learn the skills needed to become more independent with using utensils.

Strategies

- ☐ Practice scooping, pouring and filling containers. Anything that requires scooping and moving to a destination with the loaded scoop is good practice for utensil use. Try uncooked rice, cereal, dry beans, sand, etc; and scooping with a spoon and dumping into muffin cups, or ice trays.
- ☐ Once a child shows an interest in spoons and forks, offer them one to hold while they are eating. That way you can allow them the opportunity to try while still feeding them.
- ☐ Use toddler-sized utensils with plastic grips. Smaller utensils are easier for small hands to grasp and the plastic handles offer more grip. Thicker grips are often easier to control than thin ones as well.
- ☐ Eat meals together. Children learn by watching and imitating what you (and siblings) are doing.
- ☐ Demonstrate eating with utensils to your child so they have a model. Show them how to load the spoon and poke with a fork.
- ☐ Practice eating with utensils by offering thick, sticky foods like yogurt, oatmeal, applesauce, mashed potatoes, etc. These types of foods stick to the spoon ensuring success and avoiding dumping it off the spoon on the way to the mouth.
- ☐ Give lots of encouragement and expect a mess. The mess is part of the learning process. Enjoy the fun, make a mess and worry about the mess

when they are finished. Spreading a shower curtain under the highchair or table may help with clean up.

- ☐ Provide your child with dishes that do not slip so they can scoop the food easier. Non-slip grips on the bottom on plates, bowls and/or placemats may help with this.

This sheet was created by the occupational therapists at the George Jeffrey Children's Centre. This sheet is not specific to your child, but provides general information.