



Very early feeding difficulties in the first two years of life

M Maldonado, L Helmig, C Moody,
C Millhuff

Thanks to the Gerber Foundation

Very early feeding difficulties

- Breastfeeding Clinic
- Pediatric well-baby clinic
- WIC Program (Health Department)

- - - - -

Parents readily identify feeding problems
in their babies... if asked.

Screening for feeding problems

- Differentiate feeding problems from “failure to thrive”
- Growth faltering... can occur at different developmental points: sucking, introduction of semisolids, of solids, self-feeding, etc.
- Parents need concrete examples of feeding problems

Screening for feeding problems

- Do you have worries about how your baby eats?
- Non-referred population
- Anchor questions regarding appetite, sucking, chewing, food preferences, types and textures of foods, behavior during feedings

Screening for feeding problems

- Questions about gastroesophageal reflux
- Frequent vomiting
- Making self gag or vomit
- Weight gain, growth in stature
- Correlation with other behavioral difficulties? E.g. sleeping, crying, attention span

Screening for feeding problems

- Parents are reliable reporters
- Clinicians are reliable observers
- Feeding is one aspect of child's functioning and organization
- Feeding is one aspect of parent infant relationship
- Feeding is one aspect of ecology of the infant

Screening...

```
graph LR; A[SURVEY OF FEEDING QUESTIONS AND OTHER AREAS] --> B((IF PROBLEMS)); B --> C(EVALUATION OF FEEDING HISTORY, FEEDING RELATIONSHIP, SYMPTOMS IN OTHER AREAS, PARENT INFANT RELATION, STRESS AND ENVIRON., DEMOGRAPHICS, IMPACT OF FEEDING PROBLEM);
```

SURVEY OF
FEEDING
QUESTIONS
AND
OTHER
AREAS

IF
PROBLEMS

EVALUATION OF

- *FEEDING HISTORY
- *FEEDING RELATIONSHIP
- *SYMPTOMS IN OTHER AREAS
- *PARENT INFANT RELATION
- *STRESS AND ENVIRON.
- *DEMOGRAPHICS
- *IMPACT OF FEEDING PROBLEM

What are the early feeding problems

- Concerns about weight gain, amount and rate of weight gain
- Concerns about sucking, strength, maintenance, time to suck a given amount of milk
- Concerns about frequent vomiting, reflux, regurgitation,

What are the feeding problems?

- Concerns about behavior at mealtimes
- Difficulty managing to suck or eat
- Difficulty sitting still or concentrating
- Difficulty to maintain a state of alertness
- Becoming tired and going to sleep

What are the feeding problems?

- Progression of feeding and eating abilities
- Managing higher consistencies
- Managing new textures and flavors
- Behavior during mealtimes
- Difficulties in other areas of functioning, eg irritability, sleeping problem, etc.

Presenting feeding problems..in infant

- -
 -
 -
- Very young infant*, first 4 months of life
- *difficulty regulating states of alertness
 - *"sleeping all the time" or sleeping too much
 - *falling asleep during sucking
 - *weak sucking, brief bursts of sucking and going to sleep. Suck is weak and not effective

Presenting feeding problem, in infant

- *Early months*
- *Eating too fast*
- *"marathon feedings"*
- *Chocking frequently because of inability to swallow at pace of sucking*
- *Fear the child will choke*

Presenting feeding problem in infant. Overensitive

- Few months of age...
- Problem in maintaining a calm state to eat
- Too sensitive baby... too responsive to stimuli in surroundings
- Unable to focus on the act of eating

Oversensitive ctd...

- Becoming overstimulated by act of sucking or eating
- Easily distracted by noise or visual stimuli
- Unable to calm the body and keep on sucking or eating
- Other regulatory problems, focus, sleeping, crying, etc.

Oversensitive, ctd.

- Child may be hypertonic
- Child may “only eat while going to sleep”
- Child may only eat while asleep, e.g .
Only during the night
- Active maneuvers to interrupt feeding
or avoid being fed (tongue, etc.)

Presenting feeding problems, infant

- Near first birthday...
- Only will drink liquids
- Does not accept many textures or solids
- Excessively selective
- Difficulties with chewing, self-organization, trying new things

Presenting feeding problems.. infant

- Around first birthday
- Making self gag
- Inability to feed self
- Eating too fast
- Eating too slow
- Difficulties chewing food

Feeding in infancy...transactional issues

- Given the child's challenges, what can parents do?
- Parents invent strategies to feed their particular child
- Try different ways , positions, nipples, times
- Feeding the baby can be very challenging

Transactional issues ctd.

- Parental features
- Experience in feeding infants
- Being exposed to various techniques
- Ability to “read” the infant
- Ability to observe the infant’s challenges
- Ability to problem solve, adapt, invent
- Capacity to seek help

Feeding transaction

- Attributions to the infant
- Perceived nature of the problem
- “I was 24 pounds at age five”
- Fear that the infant will be fat
- Maintaining a regime that is challenging and problematic

Feeding an infant

- Feeding problems can exist in isolation
- Often they are are marker of other difficulties in the infant:
- Regulation of states
- Self-regulation, management, sensory integration, focus, etc.
- Often coexist with sleeping and crying problems