

Child Self Feeding

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Is your child mimicking you when you are eating?

Does your child open their mouth when they see food going towards your mouth or their own mouth?

Is your child trying to grab the spoon or bowl when you are feeding them?

Is your child trying to touch or grab food off your plate when you are eating near him/her?

Most of these behaviours are normal and occur around 7-9 months old. This may also be the time you may want to introduce your child to start feeding themselves. Although they may not be able to use a spoon until around 1 year of age, handling food and feeding themselves is a positive and rewarding experience for your child. Children learn through copying what you do and playing.

Most parents find it much easier and cleaner to feed a baby themselves but this limits the learning experience that goes along with a child learning to feed themselves.

There are many reasons for children to feed themselves. But if you needed any more convincing, here are a few of my personal findings:

- You don't have to do it - saving you time! You will need to be around to supervise the eating experience, but it does leave your hands free so you can eat at the same time (your child will learn a lot by watching you eat with him/her) or you could be preparing a meal for yourself and talking to your baby while they eat.
- Self feeding may take longer initially because children won't be in a hurry to eat when left to feed themselves, so leave yourself some time to let them do it at their pace. Normally 20 minutes is sufficient before children start throwing their bowl overboard and it is then time to take it away, as it may be a sign they are full.
- Your baby will eat as much as they want to and it allows them to choose what they want to eat. Have you ever had a craving for a certain vegetable or a certain taste this may be due to some vitamins lacking that your body needs and your child will know what they need and how much they need.
- Children naturally want to experiment or 'play' with their food. Your child will value the experience of learning what the food feels like, the texture and the taste which may make them more open to other tastes. Children may eat a wider range of foods and more readily than if things are pureed all the time and fed to them.
- Most importantly children who feed themselves learn to develop their fine motor skills and coordination as well as some independence. Fine motor skills develop with age, but the practice that a child develops when self feeding may enhance this skill.

With these skills your child has a good chance of being an independent eater by around 14 or 16 months. So by putting up with mess you allow your child the chance to develop skills and that will shorten the time needed for you to have to be available for feeding them meals in the future.

Two Tips:

1) When you are supervising you may want to notice how your child is chewing or swallowing, how he/she is holding the finger foods or what they are doing with their spoon. This will give you cues as to how much you need to be involved and how much you can let them do it.

2) By using a highchair or stroller the risk of choking is reduced and also provides a lesson that there is a place to eat.

References:

http://www.babycenter.com/0_finger-foods_105.bc

<http://www.homemade-baby-food-recipes.com/tips-for-coping-with-a-messy-eater.html>

<http://www.homemade-baby-food-recipes.com/baby-led-weaning.html#ixzz0uyaYmCGh>

Eleanor is a Counsellor and specialises in child counselling, child behaviour and personality. Eleanor is the founder of Parent with Potential, which developed The Preschooler Personality Kit™ in 2005. Parent with Potential provides parents with resources, information and practical solutions pertaining to child behaviour issues with a focus on 2-10 year olds. For more information visit

<http://www.parentwithpotential.com> or check out their facebook page

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