

Pediatric Feeding Team Specialists

The discipline descriptions below were taken from these organizations. Please click on the links to visit the association websites.

[American Speech-Language-Hearing Association \(ASHA\)](#)

[American Occupational Therapy Association \(AOTA\)](#)

[American Physical Therapy Association \(APTA\)](#)

[Behavior Analyst Certification Board \(BACB\)](#)

[Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#)

[Healthychildren.org](#)

Gastroenterologists

Medical conditions of the digestive system can lead to constipation, irregular bowel movements, or vomiting. Also, they can affect motility or the ability to absorb or digest nutrients properly, which may cause pain or discomfort during or after eating.

Gastroenterologists are medical specialists who help determine safe and necessary feeding interventions and supports.

Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN)

Registered dietitian nutritionist (RDNs) address a child's growth and nutritional needs. RDNs are food and nutrition experts who have earned a bachelor's degree; completed an accredited, supervised practice program; passed a national board examination, and attended continuing education courses to maintain their licensing.

*Speech Language Pathologists

Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) treat many types of communication and swallowing problems. They work with children who have trouble with speech sounds, language skills, social communication skills, voice, fluency and feeding and swallowing skills.

*Occupational Therapists

Occupational therapists (OTs) help children maximize function through the therapeutic use of everyday activities or occupations. Occupations include any activity that is needed to participate in everyday life, such as feeding, eating, and swallowing. OTs often help children participate in routine tasks, improve fine motor skills, develop social skills, recover from injuries and regain function through retaining and/or adaptations.

**In the United States, occupational therapists and speech language pathologists may earn specialty certifications from their national accreditation boards in feeding and/or swallowing. An occupational therapist may earn a Board Specialty Certification in Feeding, Eating and Swallowing (SCFES) and a speech language pathologist may earn the title Board Certified Specialist in Swallowing (BCS-S). These certifications are an attestation of advanced knowledge. Professionals who earn board certification or who have sought expert-level competency in feeding and swallowing are often referred to as feeding specialists or feeding therapists.*

Physical Therapists

Physical therapists (PTs) are movement experts who use exercises, hands-on-care and education to improve a child's quality of life. PTs aim to restore and improve mobility in order for children to explore their environment and participate in functional activities. A PT develops plans to improve movement abilities, reduce or manage pain, restore function and prevent disability.

Behavioral Analysts

Behavior analysts study the science of behavior and work to improve a child's function through behavior change or modification. Behavior analysts may earn certifications as a paraprofessional level Registered Behavioral Technician (RBT), an undergraduate level Board Certified Assistant Behavioral Analyst (BCaBA), or a graduate level Board Certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA). Both RBTs and BCaBAs must work under the supervision of a behavior analyst with a more advanced degree or training. Licensure to practice is required in 31 states. Not all states require regulation of behavioral analysts.

Psychologists

A counselor with a master's degree or doctoral degree in psychology (Psy.D.), philosophy (Ph.D.) or education (Ed.D.). Trained to make diagnoses and conduct individual and group therapy. Only psychologists are able to administer many of the tests used to measure a young person's intellect and psychological health.

Other Specialists:

Allergists/Immunologists

Food allergies and intolerances may cause pain or discomfort throughout the gastrointestinal tract. This may lead to a refusal to eat, difficulty with digestion, irregular bowel movements, or frequent vomiting. Respiratory allergies may further complicate the feeding process, making it harder to coordinate feeding and breathing (see Pulmonologist below).

[Cardiologists](#)

Children who have cardiac conditions are often fatigued by daily activities, especially eating. These children may not have enough energy during mealtimes or throughout the day to be able to eat enough calories to sustain proper nutrition. Some cardiac conditions may have associations with genetic disorders that are associated with challenges related to feeding. Caregivers may see children with cardiac conditions as “fussy” and hard to feed, thus leading to feeding challenges. This is crucial because weight gain may be very important in determining readiness for surgical procedures.

[Dentists](#)

Children who struggle to eat are often sensitive in and defensive about their mouth, which can make tooth brushing and oral care very challenging. In addition, minimal chewing may delay the loosening of baby teeth. Bottle-feeding at night (often resorted to by parents concerned with limited amounts of daytime feeding) can cause cavities in teeth, which cause pain and further limit food intake. Dentists may also be helpful if a child grinds their teeth excessively thereby reducing the enamel on their teeth and making chewing difficult.

[Endocrinologists](#)

Hormones help control a child’s metabolism, nutrition, growth, and energy. A child can experience feeding and nutritional issues associated with these conditions because of the body’s inability to process certain nutrients.

[Geneticists](#)

Genetic disorders may be associated with poor feeding or poor growth, which can affect a child’s overall development. In turn, this affects a child’s ability to progress through developmental feeding milestones or efficiently process food for energy.

[Neurologists](#)

Neurodevelopmental and neurological conditions may affect a child’s ability to coordinate a safe and effective swallow or to self-feed. Certain conditions affecting the central nervous system are highly associated with feeding challenges and require specific treatments.

[Otolaryngologists \(ENTs\)](#)

Problems with adenoids, sinuses, chronic ear infections, or tonsils often affect the swallowing process or even the desire to eat. Stuffiness, wheezing, and nasal regurgitation during or shortly after feeding are common symptoms associated with such conditions.

[Pulmonologists](#)

Medical conditions of the respiratory system can lead to increased fatigue, increased oxygen requirements, poor management of secretions, a decreased ability to coordinate breathing and eating, or a decreased ability to safely swallow and control food and liquids. Respiratory problems and illnesses often increase the body's need for additional calories as a source of energy.

[Radiologists](#)

A radiologist commonly interprets many of the diagnostic tests and images used to evaluate underlying medical conditions that may be affecting a child's ability to eat and maintain nutrition. In addition, a radiologist often assists in the placement or ongoing care of feeding tubes.