

# Feeding and Swallowing Disorders Spotlight on: School-Age Children



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Better Hearing & Speech Month

Most school-age children, from kindergarteners to teenagers, will not have their first problems with eating or drinking (*feeding or swallowing disorders*) during this stage of life—because these disorders most often begin either in early childhood or adulthood. However, children with feeding difficulties may be challenged by new school settings and social situations—as more and more food is consumed away from home.

## New Levels of Independence

A school cafeteria—with groups of noisy children, a short time window for eating, and different food choices—can be difficult to navigate for children with feeding or swallowing disorders. It also may mark the first time that some children are eating a daily meal outside the home. Some children who had feeding issues that were previously under control may find the transition tough.

## An Increasingly Social Experience

More social events begin to include or revolve around food for kids, often away from their parents and comfort zones. For younger kids, it may be drop-off birthday parties, or it may be meals or sleepovers at friends' houses. For older kids, it may be eating meals at restaurants with friends or preparing to leave for college.

## School Success and Treatment

Students can be treated for feeding and swallowing disorders in schools. **Treatment addresses the impact on educational performance—and supports the student's ability to eat safely to avoid choking and/or other health conditions such as pneumonia.** Students with repeated illnesses related to these disorders may miss a lot of school, which can negatively affect school success. Children should have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan to guide treatment and accommodations. They also may have a Swallowing and Feeding Program (designed by a speech-language pathologist) and/or Individual Health Plan (designed by a school nurse).

## Traumatic Brain Injuries and Swallowing

Although new cases of feeding and swallowing disorders are not common during the school years, there are exceptions. According to the National Foundation of Swallowing Disorders, teens and young adults (ages 15–24) experience the second highest rate of traumatic brain injury (TBI), behind children ages 0–4—with one potential side effect being swallowing problems.



**Speech-language pathologists can help!**

Learn more at [www.asha.org/public](http://www.asha.org/public).



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