



Normal Sequence of Oral Motor Development and Eating

Age in Months	Skill
0 – 3 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Suckle/Swallow reflex ◦ Tongue, jaw, lips work as one unit ◦ Tongue movement = in/out pattern ◦ Tongue is cupped to provide channel for backward movement of liquid ◦ Rooting reflex ◦ Phasic bite reflex ◦ Gag reflex
4 – 6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Suckle in anticipation of spoon ◦ Much chew pattern (5-6 months) ◦ Tongue and jaw move as one unit ◦ Poor coordination of suck, swallow, breathe ◦ Rooting phasic bite decreases by 5 months ◦ Gag reflex
7 – 9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Mixed tongue movements: in/out and up/down ◦ Active lip movements for closure on bottle and to clear spoon ◦ Cup drinking – unstable jaw ◦ Tongue protrusion on swallow ◦ Some jaw separation from tongue and lip during bite ◦ Transfer of food – side to center, center to side ◦ Lip closure for swallowing semi-solids ◦ Gag is slightly less sensitive
10 – 12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ True suck ◦ Cleans lower lip with teeth ◦ Improved coordination of suck, swallow, breathing ◦ Tongue protrusion on swallow ◦ Controlled bite on soft cookie ◦ Improved lip closure for swallowing liquids ◦ Transfer of foods across midline is beginning (i.e., beginning rotary pattern) ◦ Active lip, check movement during chewing
13 – 15 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ May bite on cup to achieve stabilization ◦ Independent tongue and lip movements ◦ Good coordination of suck, swallow, breathing ◦ Lip closure during chewing ◦ Some stability for controlled bite on hard cookie
16 – 18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Some internal jaw stability ◦ Reduced tongue extension during swallowing ◦ Good control of liquid ◦ Controlled bite without associated head movement ◦ Smoother integration of tongue, lip, and jaw movements ◦ Uses tongue to clean lips
19 – 24 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Can drink in long sequences ◦ Straw drinking with lips ◦ Tongue retraction for swallowing ◦ Chews meats competently ◦ Transfers across midline
25 – 36 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Internal jaw stabilization ◦ Tongue-tip elevation for swallowing ◦ Appropriate jaw grading for bite ◦ Total dissociation of head movement for bite ◦ Smooth transfer of food from side-to-side ◦ Gradual refinement of tongue movements