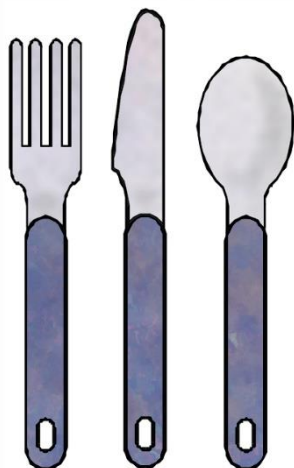


Using Cutlery



Using cutlery can be a tricky task. It requires us to use both hands at once, hand strength and co-ordination.

Here are some advice and strategies to help if your child struggles using cutlery:

Positioning for Mealtimes

It is very important that your child is correctly positioned when sitting down for mealtimes. This will facilitate good cutlery skills and promote focus on the task.

- Have your child seated in a suitable sized chair with their hips flex at 90 degrees, feet flat on floor (or footplate), bottom and back supported.
- You can use cushions or rolled up towels to help your child stay sitting up straight in their chair.
- Ensure your child is sitting close to the table and that it is at the right height (elbows comfortably supported).
- Try to keep the table free from clutter, this will encourage them to concentrate on the task.
- Ask your child to help you set the table while they wait for their food. This helps to develop routine and teaches your child to locate cutlery.



Activities for Developing Cutlery Skills

- Use scissors – cut easy patterns to start and move to complex designs.
- Using playdoh – practice cutting using cutlery and rolling shapes.
- Cooking/Baking – uses both hands for tasks like mixing ingredients.
- Colouring – holding paper with one hand whilst other colours.
- Opening screw top items such as bottles or jars.
- Construction games such as Lego, Duplo, Meccano, K'nex, Jenga etc.
- Fine motor games such as Solitaire, Tiddlywinks and marbles, Dominos etc.
- Elastic band stretched between fingers.

Early Stages

- Try backwards chaining tasks to teach them a new skill. This involves teaching the last step first, then teach them the second-last step, then the third-last step and so on. Here is one way to break down using a spoon into steps:
 1. Start by supporting the action completely. Gradually reduce the amount of physical support you provide as the child becomes more independent.
 2. Start by encouraging your child to hold a spoon or cup whilst feeding so they get used to handling cutlery.
 3. Help your child scoop the food, bring the spoon up to their mouth and put the spoon into their mouth. Your child is responsible for removing the food.
 4. Help your child scoop the food and bring the spoon up to their mouth. Your child is responsible for putting the spoon into their mouth and removing the food.
 5. Help your child scoop the food. Your child is responsible for bringing the spoon up to their mouth, putting the spoon into their mouth and removing the food from the spoon.
 6. Your child can now try using the spoon independently - expect some mess!



- You can also practice using a spoon during other activities e.g. when playing with play dough, when playing with sand or water, trying to scoop dry rice or lentils out of a bowl, or during craft activities.
- All children learn in different ways so you might need to try a different approach. Consider trying the following methods to teach your child:
 - Physically assist your child (Hand-over-hand technique)
 - Show your child - do the task alongside your child.
 - Tell your child - talk your child through each step of the process.

Cutting Skills

- Advise your child to hold the knife in their dominant hand.
- Start small, encourage, your child to practice a few cuts to begin with.
- Once your child gets good at using the knife, in a sawing motion, introduce the fork to the task.
- Remind your child to hold the food still with the fork and cut using the knife. Repeat this phrase while they are using cutlery to prompt them.
- If your child will accept physical help – stand behind them and help the hand with the fork stay steady whilst the knife moves back and forth.
- Try cutting soft food first before moving onto tougher foods.
- Teach your child to increase the pressure when cutting tougher foods by encouraging them to put their index finger along the back of the cutlery.
- Gauging the amount of pressure required can be difficult for children to learn. To help, experiment with different food textures, talk about different textures and how hard you need to press.
- Encourage your child to not hold the knife too tightly. This will allow for natural movement of the knife during cutting up foods.
- Practice, practice, practice - Be patient and persevere with giving your child the support they need until they are independent with cutlery.



Cutlery Alternatives

If your child is finding managing conventional cutlery tricky there are lots of different alternatives. Cutlery with thick, chunkier handles can be easier for a child to hold and use. Using a non-slip mat, such as Dycem, will prevent the plate or bowl from sliding away from your child.

Here are a few examples of the alternatives you could try:

Thick Handled Cutlery



Curved Handled Cutlery
(Caring Cutlery)



Dycem Mat



Information adapted from our colleagues at NHS Oxfordshire (<https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Self-Care-Developing-Cutlery-skills-older-children-2015.pdf>)

Further resources:

For more resources to help with developing skills or for further helpful tips and tricks, please visit our website or lookout for our Facebook posts.

www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/cypot

www.facebook.com/CYPOTNHSBorders

