



## PART 1: FEEDING FUNDAMENTALS

### INFORMATION FOR SUPPORTING POSITIVE AND SAFE MEALTIMES

#### CHAPTER 1: FEEDING BASICS FOR EVERY CHILD & CAREGIVER

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## SECTION 1.1: POSITIONING BASICS

### WHAT IS POSITIONING?

Positioning relates to the way we hold a child in our arms or our laps, and how we place a child in a chair, seat or on the floor for mealtimes.

The way we position a child will depend on:

- ① age of the child
- ② general developmental skills of the child, especially physical capabilities
- ③ individual needs of the child (e.g., higher elevation of body during feeding due to reflux, increased head/trunk support due to low tone, etc.)
- ④ caregiver's abilities
- ⑤ resources available in the environment

### WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIONING?<sup>7</sup>

Ensuring a child is properly positioned during feedings is critical to keeping them safe. When children are positioned properly during meals, in particular those with disabilities or medical needs, feedings are safer, more efficient and more comfortable for both the child and the caregiver.

#### BENEFITS OF GOOD POSITIONING

##### ↓ INCIDENCE OF ASPIRATION, ILLNESS, DEATH

- ↑ efficiency of feedings (e.g., faster)
- ↑ oral intake during feedings
- ↑ capacity for children to try different food textures
- ↑ breathing capacity
- ↑ digestion of foods and liquids
- ↑ skills for using vision and hands for self-feeding
- ↑ capacity for children to feed themselves
- ↑ enjoyment during feedings (for children & caregivers)
- ↑ growth and nutrition
- ↑ capacity to interact socially with others

#### RISKS OF POOR POSITIONING







##### ↑ INCIDENCE OF ASPIRATION, ILLNESS, DEATH

- ↓ efficiency of feedings (i.e., slower)
- ↓ oral intake during feedings
- ↓ capacity for children to try different food textures
- ↓ breathing capacity
- ↓ digestion of foods and liquids
- ↓ skills for using vision and hands for self-feeding
- ↓ capacity for children to feed themselves
- ↓ enjoyment during feedings (for children and caregivers)
- ↓ growth and nutrition
- ↓ capacity to interact socially with others



## KEY ELEMENTS OF POSITIONING FOR ALL AGES

This section covers ideal positioning for children of all ages, including infants, toddlers, older children and children of all ages with disabilities. No matter a child's age, it is essential that a caregiver consider these six key elements when positioning any child for a meal.

KEY ELEMENTS	PROPER POSITION
Hips	 Positioned at 90 degrees
Trunk	 Upright, not leaning forward, backward or sideways
Shoulders	 Level and facing forward
Head	 Chin slightly tucked toward chest; head upright and facing forward
Knees	 Positioned at 90 degrees
Feet	 Supported on the floor, chair footrests or other object; flat position



## COMMON POSITIONS ACROSS THE AGES<sup>7</sup>

Ideal positions for feeding a child will change as he or she grows older and as a child's development progresses. For example: As a young baby becomes older, bigger, and stronger, she will typically need less external support from a caregiver to keep her body in proper positioning for mealtimes. Shared below are common, optimal feeding positions for young babies and children. *Refer to Chapter 2, Section 2.3 and Chapter 3, Section 3.3 for illustrations and photos of each position listed below).*

### BIRTH TO 3 MONTHS

Young babies 0-3 months old require complete support of the head, neck, trunk and pelvic area during all feedings. Total support is needed because young babies do not yet have enough strength to hold these areas in proper position on their own.

#### *Common Feeding Positions:*

Held in a caregiver's arms for breastfeeding and/or bottle feeding.

#### **Bottle Feeding Positions:**

- Cradle
- Side-Lying
- Reclined on pillows on lap of caregiver
- Seated in lap of caregiver
- Seated in infant carrier or seat

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### 4 – 8 MONTHS OLD

Babies 4-8 months old typically demonstrate a need for moderate support of the head, neck, and trunk during feedings. As they near 8 months old, they may require even less support, showing the ability to sit upright on their own or when in a supportive chair. This is because a baby at this age is developing more physical strength throughout her entire body. Of note, babies in this age range are introduced to solid foods. Appropriate positioning support is required for a baby to successfully and safely handle this new experience.

#### *Common Feeding Positions:*

Held in a caregiver's arms for breastfeeding and/or bottle feeding. (Ideal between 4-6 months old)

Seated in a caregiver's lap, on the floor or in a supportive seat or chair. (Ideal between 6-8 months old when offering solid foods)

#### **Bottle Feeding Positions:**

- Reclined on pillows on lap of caregiver
- Seated in lap of caregiver

- Seated in a supportive chair or seat

### **Solid Food Positions:**

- Seated in lap of caregiver
- Seated in a supportive chair or seat
- Seated on the floor with caregiver support

## 9 – 15 MONTHS OLD

Children 9-15 months old typically demonstrate a need for minimal to moderate physical support during feedings. They continue to develop improved physical strength and control throughout the entire body, sitting upright on their own, crawling, standing, walking and transitioning between positions (e.g., moving from sitting to standing). Of note, children in this age range are typically weaned off of bottles and introduced to cups for drinking. Additionally, solid food becomes more heavily relied on. Because of these new experiences, appropriate positioning support that matches a child's individual needs must be identified to help him become a successful and safe eater.

### *Common Feeding Positions:*

Seated in a caregiver's lap, on the floor or in a supportive seat or chair.

### **Feeding Positions:**

- Seated in lap of caregiver
- Seated in a supportive chair or seat
- Seated on the floor with caregiver support

## 16 MONTHS AND OLDER

Children 16 months and older typically demonstrate a need for minimal physical support during mealtimes. They are able to sit upright on their own and they enjoy eating with and around other people. Because of her growing strength and skill, a child in this age range can often sit in a booster chair at a table or sit in a child-size chair at a table equally sized to fit her needs. Although children of this age require less support, it is still important that any chair, seat or table they use appropriately supports each of the six key elements previously discussed.

### *Common Feeding Positions:*

Seated in a caregiver's lap, on the floor or in a supportive seat or chair.

### **Feeding Positions:**

- Seated in lap of caregiver
- Seated in a supportive highchair, booster chair or seat
- Seated on the floor with caregiver

- Seated at a child-size table and chair set
- Seated in an appropriately sized or modified wheelchair or adaptive stroller or chair



## POSITIONING TIPS FOR ALL AGES

### TIP 1:

Always consider the individuality of a child when choosing a feeding position and level of support. As children become older and stronger, most who are developing typically will require less support for maintaining a good position during feedings. However, every child is different and will not always follow this path, so care must be individualized.

### TIP 2:

Always consider a child's developmental skill level when choosing a feeding position. Choose a position based on needs, skill-level and age. For example: A 3-year-old child who has very weak muscles (low tone) may require extra supports to hold his head upright in a chair for mealtimes, despite being “old enough” to sit in a chair.

### TIP 3:

Always consider the comfort of the caregiver during a feeding. Observe how your body feels when feeding a child. Is your back hurting? Are you slouched in an uncomfortable position? Is a child too heavy? Can you maintain the position for the length of the meal? Find a position that not only meets the needs of the child, but that is also sustainable and healthy for you.

### TIP 4:

Always remember that children grow. As a child gets bigger and as their skills develop, the position they eat in may need to change. It's normal and essential for positions to change over time to fit a child's growing needs.


### TIP 5:

Always remember that finding the best position can sometimes take a lot of work. Even a child who is typically developing may require caregivers try different positions until they find the one that works just right. Take your time, watch and see how a child responds and make small changes as needed.



## FINAL THOUGHTS

Finding the proper positioning for a child is not always an easy task. It can take time, effort, thought, practice and patience. When unsure about the best position for a child, seek out the support of others. Often, sharing challenges or questions with other caregivers and team members can lead to greater problem-solving and creative solutions as well as alleviate stress.

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- *For more age-specific positioning information, refer to Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5.*
  - *For more information on positioning the child with a disability or medical needs, refer to Chapter 7.*
  - *For more information on creative seating, refer to Chapter Appendix 9I.*
  - *For more information on quick positioning challenges and solutions, refer to Chapter Appendix 9M.*