

Messy food play

Messy food play can help de-sensitise children with eating and feeding problems. Messy food play is about introducing different food smells, tastes and textures through play. It is hoped that by experiencing foods in a fun way, a child will be more willing to try tasting and eating new foods. This leaflet gives parents and carers advice and tips on introducing and progressing different textures.

Top tips

- Keep sessions fun! If your child is overwhelmed, getting upset or not interested then put the messy play away and try again another day.
- Start with a short playtime using one food item and gradually increase the number of food items and how long you play for.
- It works best if you're involved too – sit down with your child and do some messy play with them. Talk about the items you're playing with and show how you are interacting with them too.
- It will be messy, so give your child a flannel or wipe / clean their hands if they need to do so. A wipe clean tablecloth and apron might also be helpful.

Let's play!

- Start small by putting a small amount of food on the table and encourage your child to push it around. Encourage them to do this by doing it yourself if necessary.
- With dry textures you could thread pasta or Cheerios onto string.
- Moist textures, such as fruit, could be put onto a skewer to make a fruit kebab.
- Try making pictures, such as a face, with the different foods.
- You could try moving items by hand from one bowl to another and back again, or tipping onto the table and then tidying up.
- Try mixing two different dry textures and sorting them out
- The important thing is to get your child to engage in the activity of touching and feeling the different textures

STEP 1: Dry textures

- Dry pasta shapes
- Breakfast cereals
- Uncooked rice
- Dried lentils / beans
- Flour
- Icing sugar



- Polenta or other grains like bulgar wheat or quinoa
- Brown sugar
- Marshmallows

STEP 2: Moist textures

- Cooked pasta, rice, lentils (allow to cool and dry slightly)
- Chopped fruit or veg (not banana as it is too mushy)
- Grated cheese
- Biscuit / pastry dough



STEP 3: Wet / sticky textures

- Mashed potato
- Custard / yoghurt
- Oobleck (cornflour and water – 1.5cups of cornflour mixed with 1 cup of water (<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/oobleck>))
- Jelly
- Instant whipped puddings (Angel Delight), mousse
- Honey, jam, Marmite
- Water icing (125g icing sugar mixed with 15ml of warm water)



Contacting us

If you have any queries, please contact the branch of the Dietetic Department where you child is seen.

East Berkshire Community Dietitians	0118 904 3250
West Berkshire Community Dietitians	0118 904 3251
Royal Berkshire Hospital Dietitians	0118 322 7116
CYPF East Berkshire Dietitians	0118 918 0571
CYPF West Berkshire Dietitians	0118 918 0571

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Produced by: Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Dietitians, October 2023

Next review due: October 2025