



Functional Feeding Program at The Children's Institute of Pittsburgh

Eating is an essential element of our physical and psychosocial well-being. The Functional Feeding Program at The Children's Institute provides inpatient and outpatient evaluation and treatment for children with mild to severe feeding concerns from birth through 21 years of age. This includes children with extensive medical complexities who have feeding disorders such as pediatric transplant patients.

A positive treatment approach is utilized, allowing children to develop a more positive experience with food.



Who Can Benefit:

The Children's Institute's Functional Feeding Program addresses different types of feeding-related problems. Treatment can help children who exhibit symptoms such as:

- **delays in oral motor skills**, such as being unable to suck (drink) from a bottle or chew
- sensory issues such as being **unable to tolerate a texture** or taste in the mouth
- feeding disorders associated with medical conditions, ranging in severity and cause from **gastroesophageal reflux to organ transplantation**
- feeding disorders associated with **developmental disorders such as autism**
- significant social or **behavioral problems** that impact eating
- those ready for the **transition from dependency on IV** (total parental nutrition or TPN) or tube feeding for nutrition but are **ready to eat by mouth**
- **lack of progression** to eating an adequate number of foods of various textures and/or food groups

To learn more about the evaluation process and treatment options offered through the Functional Feeding Program at The Children's Institute, please visit www.amazingkids.org or call Patient Access at 412.420.2463.

How the Functional Feeding Team Can Help

We teach every family a variety of techniques and skills to help them manage their child's eating in a step-by-step process. Family involvement and training is critical to treatment success. Prior to evaluation, the family is required to complete a Feeding Case History, which is reviewed and used by the team during each child's evaluation. If needed, a modified barium swallow study may be scheduled. Each family is encouraged to actively participate in their child's therapy sessions and instructed on how to carry over treatment programs to the home. Family support continues through discharge planning, outpatient consultation and follow-up care. The team members may also collaborate with each child's support services, including school therapists, teachers, home nurses, early intervention and/or wrap-around service providers.

The Functional Feeding Team

Our team may include:

- Physician and/or nurse practitioner
- Speech/language pathologist
- Clinical dietitian
- Occupational therapist
- Psychologist and/or Behavior Specialist
- Nursing staff (inpatient only)
- Social worker (inpatient only)

Potential Goals

Our team will establish individualized goals for each child receiving treatment. These may include:

- gain weight and grow
- accept food and drinks by mouth
- increase the variety, volume and textures of foods eaten
- learn to chew and manage a bite of food
- improve the safety of his or her swallow
- drink from a bottle or a cup
- acquire or improve self-feeding skills
- decrease or eliminate tube feedings/TPN
- decrease mealtime stress, anxiety and negative behaviors
- improve enjoyment of mealtimes with the parent, family and/or caregiver

Functional Feeding Treatment Options

In order to determine the best treatment for each child, he or she will be evaluated by the functional feeding team. Based on results of the initial evaluation, a child may be referred for ongoing outpatient treatment, monitoring via periodic outpatient team visits, or inpatient therapy.

Outpatient Functional Feeding Treatment Program

Ongoing outpatient feeding therapy is provided at our Squirrel Hill location and at our satellites in Bridgeville, Irwin and Wexford. Children typically receive treatment on a weekly basis. Frequency and type of treatment vary, depending on the child and family's needs. Therapy may include speech/language therapy, occupational therapy and nutrition.

Outpatient Functional Feeding Intensity Program

This program serves children who live within driving distance of The Children's Institute's Squirrel Hill location and who are medically stable, but need an intense burst of therapies to move them to the next stage of feeding. Goals may include initiation of oral feeding, weaning off of tube feeds, and expanding volume and variety of foods. Each child works 1:1 with trained feeding therapists, five days per week for three weeks, and receives therapeutic meals during this time. The family-friendly program is multidisciplinary, including speech/language therapy, occupational therapy, behavior specialists, nutrition services and medical services. The family remains on site for the duration of the program and family members are active participants in therapies. The family also receives feeding training to ensure carryover of skills to home.

Inpatient Functional Feeding Treatment Program

After outpatient evaluation, if the functional feeding team believes the child would be best served by intense medical management and a high volume of structured meals, then the child is admitted to the Functional Feeding Inpatient Unit at The Children's Institute's Squirrel Hill location. The unit was the first of its kind in the tri-state area. Children are frequently admitted from home. Some children, such as those with recent acute medical issues, may be admitted directly from another hospital for intensive feeding therapy and rehabilitation services. A parent or caregiver is encouraged to stay at the bedside with his or her child throughout the hospitalization, whenever possible. Children typically receive two to four therapeutic meals per day provided by specially-trained psychology staff. There are additional occupational and/or speech/language therapy sessions focused on addressing feeding difficulties, as needed. Family members receive extensive training throughout the hospital stay, in order to learn the skills they need to enable their children to eat successfully. Children with diverse rehabilitation needs may also receive additional speech/language, occupational and physical therapies to address general developmental concerns. Medical consultation by a psychiatrist (physical medicine and rehabilitation physician) and/or psychiatrist is available as the need arises.