

# REALIZE *more*

An online information, sharing and community resource for individuals with disabilities, parents, carers and professionals

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## Supporting an individual with cerebral palsy to eat

Children with cerebral palsy may need to be supported to eat so they can access schooling, here are some ways they can be assisted

A person with Cerebral Palsy may experience eating difficulties for a number of reasons, these include:

- structural abnormalities
- psychological or behavioural conditions
- motor or sensory impairments
- or something unrelated to a condition

Read more at <https://www.scope.org.uk/support/families/food/eating-difficulties#ADmJo1Gli1EVp3eS.99>

If a child with Cerebral Palsy in your class seems to be experiencing difficulties eating, please mention this sensitively to their family/ carers. If it is an ongoing difficulty they should consult their doctor as a first step.

Meal times with children with Cerebral Palsy often go on longer than expected and even that does not guarantee a child will be gaining sufficient nutrition. Studies suggest that on average at least 20% of children with Cerebral Palsy are under nourished.

Individuals with Cerebral Palsy experience difficulties with eating for a number of reasons, these include:

- Exaggerated bite reflex
- Gag reflex
- Tongue thrusting
- Tactile hypersensitivity

For these reasons, it is important to use the support of health professionals to support children's feeding needs and nutrition. Again, if you speak with their family/ carers to understand what advice they were given by the doctor. It is important to remember that mealtimes aren't just about eating. Meal times should be enjoyable and stress-free as possible, providing opportunities for communication and social interaction

### Learning to eat

You can support children in your class with Cerebral Palsy to be part of school meal times by supporting them to sit at the table with other children and feed themselves. It may take longer and be messier but will enable them to build their confidence and develop independence skills.

By taking the time to enable your student to feed themselves you will be supporting them in other ways too, such as language development and hand-eye co-ordination.

**Feeding tips** – Speak to the child's parents/ carers to understand what advice they have been given by health professionals.

Alongside professional support you can support your student in three ways:

1. Introducing food in a positive way – Support your student to see the plate and food clearly. Consider purchasing a child friendly colourful plate and utensils, if they have a favourite colour or character this might offer further encouragement.
2. Allowing your student to touch the food and smell it before eating - Smelling, touching, and learning about food helps children get a better sense of eating, and ultimately helps in the feeding process.
3. Give lots of praise and encouragement!

Further information and resources can be found at <http://www.cerebralpalsy.org.uk/>

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