

# Hand Skills

## *Utensil Use*

***Having mealtimes together is important for your child to learn by example.*** Your child will learn how to use utensils properly more quickly by watching you and the rest of the family during mealtimes.

***Development of hand grasp on utensils.*** Children should begin by using a grasp on forks and spoons so that their thumb is closest to the part of the utensil for eating, their pinky finger is nearest to the end of the utensil, and all of their fingers are wrapped around the handle. This allows the child to focus on getting the food on the utensil and then bringing it to their mouth, rather than precise motions with the utensil.



Once a child has mastered this skill, they can begin to use a more refined grasp on utensil by using their thumb, index finger, and middle finger to hold the utensil with the palm of their hand facing upward. This more refined grasp helps a child have more control of their utensil and therefore their food, and allows them to manipulate foods with more ease while eating.



***You can help your child gain these skills.*** First, if your child has never used either of the above grasps with a utensil or is having trouble with positioning, you can gently change their hand positioning so it reflects one of the grasps listed above. You can also verbally ask your child to use their utensil or ask them to change their grasp. Consistency is the most important aspect about teaching this skill. The more consistent you are about proper hand positioning, the more routine it will become for your child and the easier it will become in the future.

### Resources:

Case-Smith, J. (2005). *Occupational therapy for children* (5th ed.). Maryland Heights: Mosby/Elsevier.

<http://www.pediastaff.com/>

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