



Oral Motor Exercises

WHAT IS ORAL MOTOR?

Oral motor refers to how we use the muscles inside of our mouth. This includes the tongue, lips, cheeks, and jaw. They are all parts of our mouth and are tied to tons of muscles, and just like any muscle, it can be strong or weak. Coordinated or not coordinated. We need our oral motor skills to be able to talk, eat, or drink from a straw.

SIGNS A CHILD MAY NEED ORAL MOTOR EXERCISES

Common Red Flags:

- Food falling out of mouth while trying to eat
- Difficulty chewing; Mashs or sucks on food
- Will hold food in mouth (often referred to as “pocketing food“, there are other reasons children do this, as well)
- Gagging on food after its been in mouth (not immediately or at the sight of food)
- Mouth is often in an open position
- Tongue hangs out of mouth
- Difficulty sticking tongue out
- Never chewed on toys or teethers as a baby
- Difficulty learning to eat table and finger foods as a baby and toddler
- Preference for certain texture of food (Crunchy or soft)
- Difficulty drinking from a straw (if over 24 months old)
- Drooling (only consider when combined with other factors on this list, as drooling has many different potential causes.



HOW TO USE THESE EXERCISES

Gather your materials:

Use these exercises in play as much as possible. Once you learn about what the oral motor exercises are, you can make a list, gather any simple supplies you may need, and have them ready. Use tasty incentives and use a mirror!

Do these exercises with your child. Watching you will help them. Only practice 5-10 minutes per day. Watch your child as they move their mouth. Notice what is challenging for them. Is it rounding their lips? Is it opening their mouth? Is it lifting their tongue?

Tongue Exercises:

- Lick popsicles or lollipops outside of the mouth
- Place something sticky on the four corners of the mouth and attempt to lick it off by touching tongue to each spot.
- Click the tongue by sucking the tongue to the roof of the mouth, then "pop!"
- Sing "tatata" "nanana" "dadada" "lalalala"
- Try to reach your tongue up to your nose or down to your chin
- Count your teeth with your tongue tip
- Stick out your tongue without touching the lips or teeth





Lip and Cheek Exercises:

- Blowing kisses
- Blowing bubbles
- Drinking with a straw
 - experiment with the diameter of the straw - bigger is easier and smaller is more difficult. Also adjust the length of straw - shorter is easier.
 - Experiment with the thickness of the liquid. Yogurt, milkshakes, smoothies. Thicker texture is more challenging, thin it until your child is successful.
- Hold a carrot, pretzel, fruit leather between the lips without using the teeth to steady it
- Make silly faces
 - Kissing lips
 - Make "O" shape with lips to target rounding
 - Make "E" shape with lips to target retraction
 - Blowing fish face - puff out the cheeks and hold air with the lips closed tight.
- Humming - play with the sound. Go high/low or low/high
- Smack the lips together
- Blow whistles - tons of whistles are available. Warning: a lot of lip strength and coordination is needed to blow whistles properly. Straws and bubbles are an easier place to start then build to whistles.

