

CORE SKILL: MOVE

Healthy Habits



What You Need to Know

Infants rely on their caregivers for getting their basic needs met. Self-care (e.g., dressing, washing, and toileting) and feeding are important self-help activities – or “healthy habits” – that require certain motor and cognitive skillsets that infants are in the very early stages of developing. While your role as a caregiver is to always ensure that infants feel safe and trust that you will meet their needs, this role will gradually shift away from doing things *for* infants, to instead modeling and encouraging infants to test out their developing skills. For example, younger infants may rely solely on you for washing and rubbing soap on their hands, but as they develop, you can encourage older infants to start imitating and trying these behaviors on their own (with your support)! Pay close attention to each infant’s development of self-help skills to personalize the amount of support that you provide. In addition, be on the lookout for opportunities to naturally model, scaffold, and encourage infants to practice these important skills whenever possible throughout the day.

Things to Consider

While many of the self-care skills needed to perform tasks such as dressing, toileting, and washing do not emerge until the toddler years, one area that grows rapidly during infancy is that of self-feeding. Pay attention to signs and cues that signal infants’ readiness to try out new feeding skills. If an infant is able to grasp and hold the bottle while you feed them, give them a go at holding the bottle on their own. Or, if an infant is able to pick up and move a spoon to their mouth, let them try to feed themselves during snack. Remember, it’s okay to make a mess – this is all part of learning!

Development of Self-Care and Feeding Skills

Between birth and 9 months, infants may:	Between 8 and 18 months, infants may:
Show an emerging ability to demonstrate healthy behaviors.	Anticipate and cooperate in daily routines, such as washing hands, blowing nose, or holding a toothbrush with assistance from adults.
Show an emerging ability to use safe behaviors with adult support.	Show an emerging ability to use safe behaviors with adult support.
Show an emerging interest in engaging in healthy eating habits.	Show interest in new foods that are offered.

Setting the Stage

Provide time and space for infants to try healthy habits as independently as possible (with scaffolding). For example:

- ◆ Use meal- and snack-times as chances for infants to practice feeding themselves with as much independence as is appropriate and possible.
- ◆ Structure your classroom environment in ways that make self-care materials easily accessible to infants so that they can use them on their own (e.g., have shoes on lower shelves so that infants can reach).
- ◆ Try to involve older infants as much as possible during routines (e.g., have them grab their blanket for naptime, or let them use wipes to clean hands after a meal).



Intentional Teaching Practices to Develop Healthy Habits

OBSERVE	OBSERVE Look for ways that infants are already displaying or trying to display self-help skills. Consider who can do what at what level and how you can provide support (without taking over). Look for ways or times during the day to naturally encourage infants to do things more independently. For example, have them pull out a wipe for you at the changing table. Or, let them press the soap dispenser before washing.
FOCUS	Narrate Using Self-Help Skills Model, demonstrate, and encourage use of self-help skills. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Your own: While showing your hands, “My hands are sticky! I’m going to clean them with this wipe.” Demonstrate how to use a wipe, then smile and say, “All done! Now they are nice and clean. Now, you try!” Allow the infant to try on their own, scaffolding as needed.◆ Infants’: Smile and clap/give a high-five while saying, “You put that away all by yourself! I’m so proud of you.”
SCAFFOLD I	Model and Narrate Healthy Food Choices Draw infants’ attention to feelings/experiences of hunger or satiety. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “You are reaching for the cereal. I think you are hungry. Let’s have a snack!” Offer cereal and encourage self-feeding as much as possible. Then say, “Yum. Now you won’t feel hungry anymore!” Offer a variety of new foods. Make sure to incorporate foods with different textures (e.g., pureed fruits, a slice of fruit, and finger foods) for infants to try out and explore. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Praise when infants try new foods (e.g., clap and say, “Yay! You tried something new and liked it!”).◆ Pay attention to their reactions – if they do not like something, that’s okay!
SCAFFOLD II	Promote Child Autonomy Even though it would be quicker, simpler, and a whole lot cleaner to do everything <i>for</i> infants, allow infants to try as much on their own as they can. This helps develop autonomy and self-confidence! Pay attention to infants’ needs and preferences during snack- and meal-times. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ When to eat: Follow <i>their</i> schedule. Do not make infants wait until a scheduled time to have a snack if they are hungry now, and vice versa.◆ What to eat: Infants’ facial expressions and behaviors signal what they do and do not like. Consider these preferences, and do not force infants to eat something that they do not want or like.◆ How much to eat: It’s okay if an infant does not finish or want more of their snack. Pay attention to their cues – they will let you know when they are hungry and when they are full.
KEEP IT GOING	Consider what you learned from observing infants on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities in the Setting the Stage into your regular routines.