



## Oral Motor Skills

Oral motor skills refer to the movements of the muscles in the mouth, jaw, tongue, lips and cheeks. The strength, coordination and control of these oral structures are the foundation for feeding related tasks, such as sucking, biting, crunching, licking and chewing. They are also important for speech articulation and facial expression. In addition to the development of oral motor skills, there are other sensory related functions that come into play when examining an individual's feeding abilities. Effective sensory modulation (the ability to maintain a constant and comfortable state in one's nervous system) is important for being able to tolerate different smells, tastes and textures, as well as for maintaining a functional state of arousal and attention during mealtime and throughout the day. Accurate discrimination of touch and muscle/joint information, as well as the development of motor planning abilities, must be in place so that one can feel and move food effectively within one's mouth.

Indicators of limitations in oral motor skills and oral sensory functioning include:

- Limited dietary preferences
- Excessive drooling
- Difficulty sucking, chewing and swallowing
- Poor articulation
- Messy eating habits

Treatment emphasis at OTA The Koomar Center is on foundational oral motor skills, sensory related difficulties and functional feeding skills. Various activities can be used to improve an individual's skills in these areas. Therapists customize appropriate activities to meet the needs of their clients while helping to develop programs to ensure carryover and success in their home environment. Common specialized foundational oral motor activities used within treatment sessions include the NUK program (a deep pressure protocol to the outside and inside structures of the face); whistle/straw hierarchies developed by Sara Rosenfeld-Johnson; hands on stretching/manipulation of the oral structures; the Steps to Eating Hierarchy developed by Kay Toomey. Your therapist may recommend additional support services, depending on the severity of the individual's oral motor and/or feeding difficulties. Common recommendations include further evaluation by a speech therapist to address specific speech difficulties, nutritional consultation to address the limitations within the individual's diet, and/or recommendation for a structured feeding group such as the Munch Bunch held at OTA The Koomar Center.

### Resources:

*Just Take a Bite*, Ernsberger, Lori; Stegen-Hanson, Tania (2004)

*How to Teach Nutrition to Kids*, Liakos Evers, C. (1995), 24 Carrot Press

*Oral-Motor Activities for School-Aged Children*, Mackie, E. (1996), LinguSystems, Inc.

*Mouth Madness Oral Motor Activities for Children*, Orr, C. (1998), Therapy Skill Builders.

### Oral motor products:

[www.talktoolstm.com](http://www.talktoolstm.com)

[www.theraproducts.com](http://www.theraproducts.com)

[www.pdppro.com](http://www.pdppro.com)