

## Important Criteria to Consider When Choosing a Pediatric Feeding Program

Feeding disorders typically develop for several reasons, including medical conditions (e.g., food allergies), anatomical or structural abnormalities (e.g., cleft palate), and reinforcement of inappropriate behavior. Early diagnosis and treatment are extremely important. Here are the top questions to ask when choosing a feeding program:

**1. Is the treatment plan individualized based on the needs of the child rather than the needs of the facility?** There are a variety of reasons why a child won't eat. For some children, a medical issue is the reason. For others, sensory or behavioral issues are the cause. For many, it might be a combination of factors. Because the reasons are different for each child, the approaches must be different, too. Be sure that any program you review provides an individualized treatment plan that is appropriate for your child's needs, age and cognitive abilities.

**2. Does the program accept Medicaid and Medicare?** The program should accept federal Medicare, state Medicaid and commercial insurance. Contracts with these programs indicate that the program has met the requirements for a national standard of care.

**3. Does the program have an on-site physician?** The feeding program should have an on-site physician presence to ensure an integrated approach to increasing food intake while monitoring a child's medical needs.

**4. Does the program offer a team approach?** Because feeding disorders can be complex, a team of experts from a variety of disciplines is necessary to create a collaborative approach to treatment. Team members should collectively have expertise in occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, behavioral psychology, child life, nutrition, gastroenterology, social work and developmental medicine.

**5. Does the program offer a variety of clinical settings?** Levels of severity for feeding disorders can vary from child to child—and from month to month for each individual child, as he or she progresses through a treatment program. It is important to find a program that offers a variety of clinical settings, including inpatient, outpatient and day program services. A thorough interdisciplinary evaluation by the program will determine which placement is most appropriate based on the needs of the child and his or her stage of treatment.

**6. Is caregiver training available?** To ensure that progress made in the program carries over to other settings, a variety of caregivers involved in the child's life (parents, grandparents, other relatives, child care providers, therapists, etc.) should be part of the treatment process and be trained to implement the mealtime plan in a consistent manner.



**7. Does the program focus on the entire child or just the feeding issues?** The program should provide opportunities for consultation with other medical and therapeutic professionals to identify other issues that may be co-occurring, as well as opportunities to play in a developmentally appropriate way while supervised by experts in child life.

**8. Does the program track and publish outcome data?** The feeding program should have a process for tracking multiple outcome measures. Tracking outcomes allows families to compare independent data about success and patient and family satisfaction.

**9. Does the program measure success?** Research has shown that a behavioral approach to assessing and treating children with feeding disorders helps increase appropriate eating behaviors while decreasing inappropriate ones. A successful feeding program takes a data-based approach, which includes a behavioral assessment and treatment strategy derived from applied behavioral analysis.

**10. Does the program provide follow-up support for families once a child has been discharged?** Families should receive additional support, if needed, once their child has been discharged. This support can take many forms. Check-in phone calls, a DVD of successful sessions to reinforce strategies for families, or other forms of follow-up should be used to ensure continued success at home.

For more information, call **1-800-873-3377**, or visit:  
**KennedyKrieger.org/Feeding**

