



Children's
of Alabama®

INSIDE PEDIATRICS

Intensive Feeding Program Offers Support For Parents, Picky Eaters

One of a handful of programs of its kind in the U.S., Children's of Alabama's Intensive Feeding Program offers a transdisciplinary approach to treating children with intractable feeding challenges that often impact their growth, nutrition and development.

The program treats children with oral aversion, total food refusal, feeding tube dependence and challenges transitioning to appropriate liquids and food textures. Children in the program often have histories of complex medical problems, developmental delays, sensory issues, oral motor deficits and/or behavioral challenges. An initial evaluation seeks to identify medical, nutritional, oral-motor and behavioral feeding problems, and provides recommendations for further evaluation and treatment. Recommendations may include participation in a day treatment program.



Hilyer Watkins, a graduate of the Intensive Feeding Program at Children's of Alabama, enjoys a meal with his mother, Bridgit.

The day treatment program involves four feedings a day, five days a week, for six to eight weeks. Parents or caregivers can expect to participate in the meals during the first day of treatment and then observe each meal from an observation room for the next several weeks. As children approach their eating and drinking goals, caregivers are reintegrated into feeding sessions in order to learn and implement the same strategies used with therapists throughout treatment. Bug-in-the-ear technology allows the staff to coach to caregivers without the staff being present in the feeding room. This is an opportunity to begin the practice of meal time at home without the support of the program day-to-day.

"Incorporating the family is a key component to our treatment program" said Michelle Mastin, PhD, clinical psychologist and director of the program. "While we understand the commitment and sacrifice that families make to participate in the feeding program, without active and engaged parent involvement, we would not be successful helping the child sustain progress and make additional gains following the day treatment admission."

The day treatment program currently cares for three children at a time. Participation begins with a referral and subsequent comprehensive evaluation. During that evaluation, the team makes recommendations from a medical, nutritional, therapeutic, behavioral and psychosocial perspective. The team identifies whether a child is a candidate for the day treatment program, and if the family and team agree, the program will continue to follow up with the child until he or she is admitted into the day treatment program. During this time, the medical social worker serves as a liaison for the family to assist with coordination of care, including but not limited to potential lodging, school resources and family medical leave if appropriate.

Graduates of the Intensive Feeding Program are discharged upon reaching their identified goals. Once children complete the day treatment program, the team guides additional feeding goals at specified intervals for the next year post-discharge.

For more information about the Intensive Feeding Program and referral forms for evaluation, visit childrensal.org/intensivefeeding.