

Activity: How Full Is Your Belly?

Addresses

- Digestion
- Finding the just-right challenge for the child
- For children who need to learn to trust their own bodies after a traumatic choking or other food incident
- Interacting with food
- Interoception to understand hunger/fullness
- Tactile processing

Supplies

- Digestive tract image in this book
- Optional: body parts toy
- Stomach worksheet
- Coloring tools (ex. crayons)
- Familiar mealtime food

Location Options for this Activity

- Clinic
- Home

Recommended Developmental Age

- 2 to 3 years to point to basic digestive body parts
- 3 to 6 for more complex concepts
- 6+ for the digestive system education

Overview

This activity is helpful for increasing awareness of the body. Many times, kids fear things they don't know about. This can help them understand where the food goes when they eat and why it's important to fuel our bodies with a range of food items.

Teach and Try without Food

Show the child a picture of the stomach. (Please see the Handouts section for a handout you can provide.) Then, discuss the different parts of the digestive tract with the child. This doesn't have to be complex.

A conversation with a three-year-old might sound like this:

- Provider: *Food travels down the esophagus into the stomach.*
- Provider: *The stomach churns the food, like a blender, before sending it into the intestines.*
- Provider: *Food that isn't needed comes out as poop!* (Kids particularly love that part.)
- After you teach about digestion, you may guide them to relate it to their own body. It may go like this:
- Provider: Point to your esophagus. Then say *Where is the esophagus on your own body?*
- Provider: *Where is your stomach?*
- Provider: *Where are your intestines?*
- Provider: Discuss what each part does, getting more specific as the child grows.

If the child becomes too hung up on the "potty talk" and starts talking about poop often at the table, you can have the client give the child a simple reminder like this:

- Parent: *I'm glad you learned about your body! You can do potty talk in the bathroom as much as you want. Not at the table though, please.* Then move on and really let them get all their potty words out on the next bathroom trip.

Adaptation for Older Kiddos

A conversation with an older child, such as a 10-year-old would get a bit deeper.

- Provider: *After chewing, saliva helps the food move down the esophagus in a movement that looks like an inchworm moving (you can watch a video on this too). Each bite, called a bolus, mixes with saliva and moves down the esophagus toward the stomach.*
- Child: *Whoa!*

- Provider: *As the food moves into the stomach, there is a cap that closes on the top of the stomach and one on the bottom so that food stays in the stomach. The walls of the stomach look like a washboard (a [google image](#) might be helpful here) to help mash up the food while stomach acid cleans off the food so it's safe to digest.*
- Child: *It's like mashed potatoes.*
- Provider: *Food moves into the small intestine where micronutrients such as vitamins and minerals are absorbed into the body.*
- Child: *Those are new words for me. Can you tell me more?*
- Provider: *Food then moves from the small intestine into the large intestine where water is absorbed.*
- Child: *Ask a question.*
- Provider: *Answers question. Then finishes with *Unused food is then eliminated as poop.* (This continues to be amusing.)*

At any age, let the child draw during the lesson! Allow them to learn through play.

Teach and Try with Food

During mealtime, give the child a piece of paper with the general shape of the stomach on it as well as a crayon. Take a tummy-check break during your meal, like a seventh inning stretch. Say to the child:

- Provider: *How full is your belly right now? Can you show me by coloring this empty belly?*
- Provider: *How many bites do you think will make your belly full?*
- Provider: *That was fun! Do you want to get back to the meal now?*

After coloring, return to the meal and continue eating.

Challenge

If the child needs more guidance, color in three different stomachs prior to the meal -- empty, half full, and full. This may help the information stand out visually for a better connection to their own belly.

Additional Guidance to Consider

This is a zero-judgment game. All of these activities and broader concepts provided are zero-judgement. Allow the child to show you their picture and explain how full their belly is. Refrain from commenting on how much they have already eaten or how much they *should* eat. This activity is merely to bring the child back into contact with their own basic biological signals of hunger and fullness. It is of utmost importance that the child understands that there will be enough food to make a full belly.