

Going Beyond a Bite: A Mindful Eating Approach for Pediatric Autism and Neurodivergence

A webinar with
**Yaffi Lvova, RDN, and Hana
Eichele, MOT, OTR/L, authors
Of *Beyond a Bite Professional Edition:
Practical Approaches to Sensory and
Feeding Challenges with Autism
Spectrum Disorder and Neurodivergent
Clients***

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Public Speaker, Author

[Toddler Test Kitchen™](#)

Nap Time Nutrition ® [YouTube](#) and [podcast](#)

[Save My Sanity:](#)

[Nutritional Confidence for the Busy Parent](#)



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DISCOVER Mindful Eating FOR KIDS

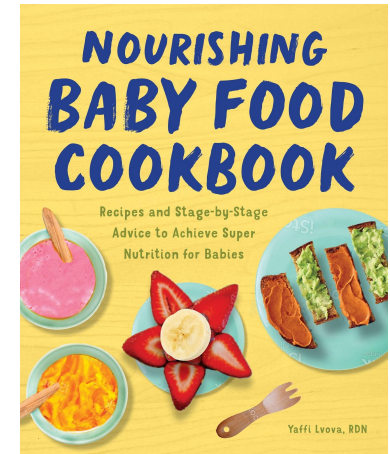
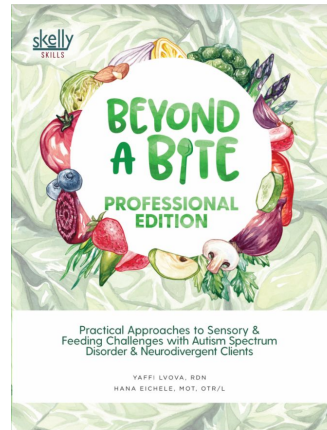
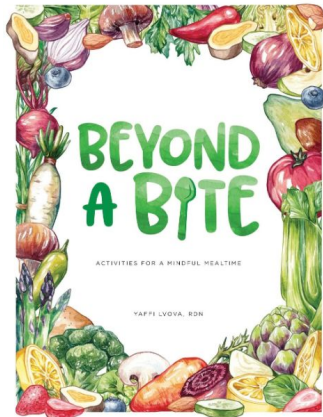
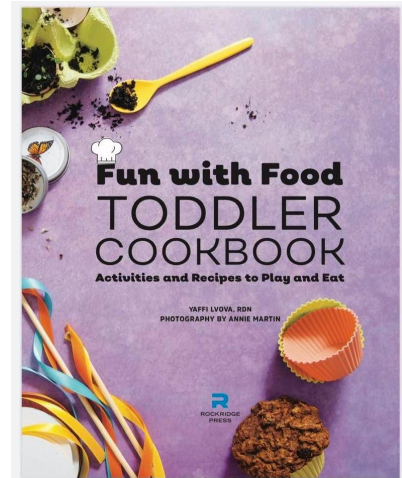
SECOND EDITION

CPHQ VERSION
2018



75 Activities for Managing Picky Eaters, Overeaters, Speed Eaters and Every Kid In-Between.

Megrette Fletcher, M.Ed., RD, CDE
with Yaffi Lvova, RDN



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Building Better Dietitians

Hana Eichele, MOT, OTR/L



Founder of a speciality feeding therapy practice in Scottsdale, Mesa, and Queen Creek, Arizona: Roots Pediatric Therapy

Co-founder of The Feeding Collective for therapist education, found on Instagram at @thefeedingcollective

Yoga instructor for kids



Disclosure to Participants

Notice of Requirements For Successful Completion

Please refer to learning goals and objectives

Learners must attend the full activity and complete the evaluation in order to claim continuing education credit/hours

Conflict of Interest (COI) and Financial Relationship Disclosures

No conflicts to disclose

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this webinar, the learner will be able to:

1. List three common feeding challenges when working with autistic, developmental delay, and sensory disordered pediatric populations.
2. Describe the sensory system and state three ways it can impact feeding and nutritional status among the pediatric ASD population.
3. List three ways to adapt the feeding environment in response to sensory stimulation to help improve intake.
4. List four goals of pediatric feeding.
5. Describe the difference between feeding, eating and swallowing.
6. List 2 oral-motor milestones.
7. List 3 aspects of positive parent communication.
8. Conduct a mindfulness-based activity with a child using appropriate counseling dialogue.

Part 1:

ASD and Neurodiverse Spectrums and Feeding



ASD, Developmental Delays and Sensory Pediatric Populations

What is neurodiversity?

- A celebration and elevation of the uniqueness of each individual
- A focus on the use of a person's learning style to teach new skills



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Sensory Processing

Sensory processing occurs through eight broad sensory systems

- Vestibular (movement and balance)
- Proprioception (body awareness)
- Interoception (internal signaling)
- Tactile (touch)
- Visual (vision)
- Auditory (hearing)
- Gustatory (taste)
- Olfactory (smell)



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Sensory Processing and Feeding Challenges

Vestibular	Poor balance while sitting at the table
Proprioception	Restless during mealtimes
Interoception	Poor appetite due to hyporeactivity in interoceptive awareness
Tactile	Selective eating due to tactile defensiveness/oral sensory oversensitivity
Visual	Visual overstimulation/light sensitivity Difficulty determining if food is familiar/safe
Auditory	overstimulation
Gustatory	Over-responsive to taste and taste aversions
Olfactory	overstimulation

Feeding Disorders and Challenges

- Pediatric Feeding Disorder (PFD) is impaired oral intake that is not age -appropriate, and is associated with medical, nutritional, feeding skill, and/or psychosocial dysfunction (Goday et al., 2019)
 - 1 in 37 American children <5 years old have a PFD (Feeding Matters, 2021)
- Food selectivity (FS)
 - repetitive/restricted behavior patterns
 - a “need for sameness” (Ausderau & Juarez, 2013)
 - sensory impairments
 - externalizing/internalizing behavior (Johnson et al., 2014)

Nutrition-related symptoms in the ASD client

Common concerns:

- Constipation, sleep disturbances, micro- and macro-nutrient deficiencies, irritability and aggression, poor appetite, anxiety

Nutritional deficiencies can present as behavioral challenges

- Adequate **hydration** and consideration of **magnesium** and/or **probiotic** supplementation may be beneficial
- Mg deficiency can exacerbate hyperactivity (Mousain-Bosc et al., 2018)
- Imbalance of **B12** and **homocysteine** commonly found in those with ADHD and ASD diagnoses is associated with oppositionality and hyperactivity



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Nutritional Concerns

- Nutritional deficiencies due to limited intake
 - Commonly iron, zinc, calcium, vitamin A, C, D, and fiber
 - Best practice is to obtain serum micronutrient levels
- Elevated prevalence of food allergies, intolerances, and sensitivities in the neurodiverse population (Li et al, 2020; Tan et al, 2019; Xu et al, 2018)



The Feeding Team

- Specialists from all four domains that impact feeding (Godoy et al., 2019)
 - Medical (RNs, PCPs, ENT, GI, other)
 - Nutrition (RDNs)
 - Feeding skill (SLPs, OTs, dentists)
 - Psychosocial (psychologists, social workers)
- Goal: To unite in their approach to provide the widest community support possible for a family and to simultaneously honor the psychology of feeding and the child's physical nutrition needs

Feeding, Eating, and Swallowing

- **Feeding** comprises the actions and attitudes prior to bringing food to the mouth.
- **Eating** involves manipulating food and liquid in the mouth.
- **Swallowing** is moving food from the mouth to the stomach.



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Part 2:

A Mindful Approach



Oral-Motor Milestones

- Consider the child's **developmental age** rather than chronological age, based on
 - Cognitive, fine motor, gross motor, language, oral-motor, social-emotional skills
- Often the parent's **expectations** do not align with the child's ability
- 14-24 months
 - finger feeding is established, utensils use becomes more efficient
- 24 months and beyond
 - oral-motor skills become efficient to allow for safe management of a variety of solid food textures



Mindful Feeding Approaches

- Responsive Feeding Therapy (Cormack, Rowell, and Postăvaru, 2020)
- The SOS Approach to Feeding (Dr. Toomey and Associates, varying years)
- The Division of Responsibility (Satter, varying years)

- Mindfulness
 - Promotes engagement, interaction, happiness
 - Reduces parental anxiety
 - Bolsters self-esteem and positive interactions
 - Helps parents to focus on the parent-child relationship rather than maintaining control

Mindful Feeding Approaches

Responsive Feeding



Not Responsive Feeding

BABYBLOOMNUTRITION

The diagram is set against a dark blue background. It features two photographs of children at a wooden table. The top photograph shows a child in a red shirt using a spoon to feed a child in a green shirt. The bottom photograph shows a child in a green shirt feeding a child in a red shirt. A white arrow on the left points downwards from the text 'Responsive Feeding' to the bottom photo. A white arrow on the right points upwards from the text 'Not Responsive Feeding' to the top photo. The text 'BABYBLOOMNUTRITION' is centered at the bottom of the diagram.

Feeding Goals

- Create a positive atmosphere
- Increase the feeling of safety at the table
- Support missing feeding skills in therapy
- Include foods that are easily within the child's current feeding skill set



Adapting the Feeding Environment for Success

Transition Strategies

- Awareness and mindfulness of what is occurring prior to the food exposure is key
- To manage anxiety, minimize distractions between tasks
- Reassess communication methods to address communication barriers (use of modeling, visual cues, transition objects instead of verbal cues)
- Assess appropriateness of activity length
- Provide a mealtime schedule to accommodate the need for predictability
- Assess postural support at mealtimes

Sensory Strategies

- Small sensory changes can make mealtime more successful
- Calming
 - Soft colors, dim lights, deep pressure massage, joint compressions, sensory bag, humming
- Alerting
 - Bright colors, fluorescent lights, tickling, wet foods, crunchy food

Mealtime routines

- Start by building a routine with one step
- Include a pre-mealtime routine
 - Movement
 - Breath
 - Handwashing
 - Setting the table
- Navigate challenges with transitions
 - Give the child a choice

Would you like a red fork or a blue fork?



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Transparency in the feeding relationship

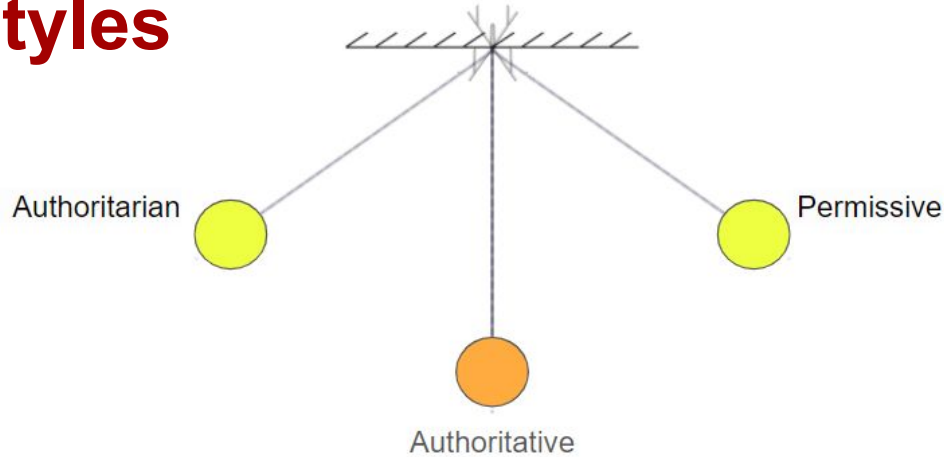
- Avoid sneaking ingredients into food
- Try incorporating ingredients
 - Include the child in food prep
- Offer at least one preferred food at each meal



Communicating with Parents/Caregivers

- Empathize and validate emotions
- Establish trust
- Encourage an Authoritative parenting style

Parenting Styles



- Authoritative parenting
 - A flexible, gentle approach that honors a child's innate biological cues and supports a child-led approach
 - *Provide the food and set the mood*
 - Fosters a willingness to eat a variety of foods

Poll Question

Which phrase BEST honors the emotions of both the parent and child?

- a) “Just take one bite”
- b) “Don’t you want to be an explorer and try something new?”
- c) “You can bring it closer to your plate when you’re ready”
- d) “If you take one bite, you can have dessert”

Practice Positive Communication

Instead of....	Try this!
Have just one more bite.	Isn't this delicious?
I'm so glad you ate that!	It's fun to try new foods!
What do you want to eat?	Would you rather have blueberries or strawberries?
Eva is so picky. She wouldn't eat that.	Eva is learning about new foods. This is what works best for her at this point.



Part 3:

How Full is Your Belly?

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 incident
- Helpful activity for increasing awareness of the body (interoception)
- Tactile processing
- Interacting with food

Location:

- Clinic or home

Supplies

- Digestive tract image from *Beyond a Bite Professional Edition: Practical Approaches to Sensory and Feeding Challenges With Autism Spectrum Disorder and Neurodivergent Clients*
- Stomach worksheet
- Coloring tools (crayons, markers)
- Familiar mealtime food
- Optional: body parts toy

How Full is Your Belly? Overview/Intro

- 1) Introduce activity
- 2) Present and discuss the picture of the stomach (adjust for age)
- 3) During the meal, provide paper with a stomach outline and a crayon along with a tummy-check break
- 4) Engage the child in a discussion about hunger/fullness
- 5) How did it go?

HOW FULL IS YOUR BELLY

Instructions: Show the child these images and discuss how it feels when their stomach (ex. Belly or tummy) is empty, half-full, or full. You can use this at the start and the end of a meal or outside of mealtime for a more in-depth discussion. When you use it, offer a crayon or food paint for the child to color their own belly!



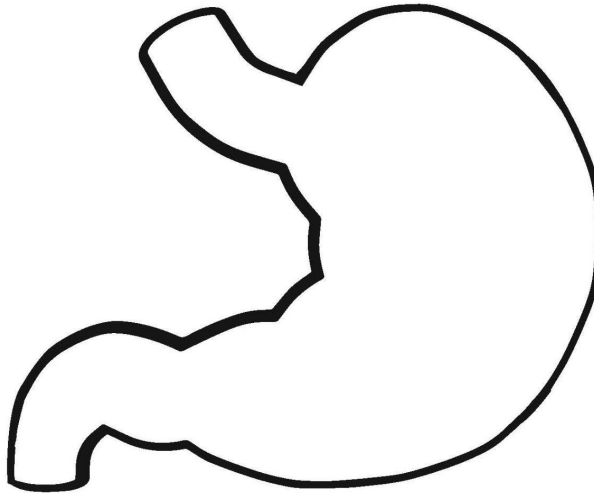
Empty



Half-Full



Full



BEYOND A BITE Get tips & activities for their neurodivergent child with the Beyond a Bite Parent Edition, available on Amazon.com.

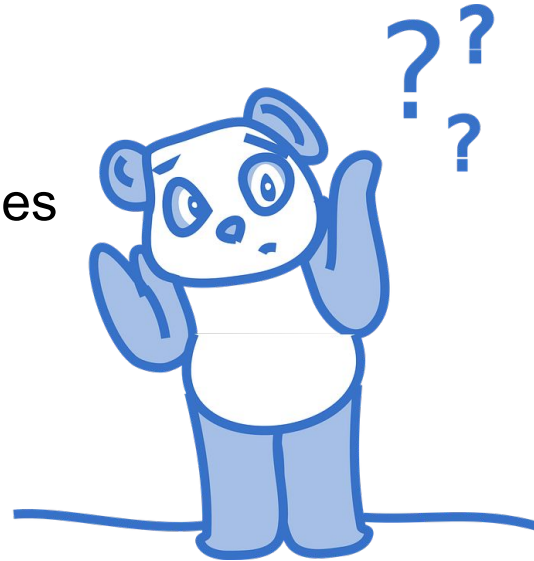
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Why it's helpful

- Help ease fear by providing a better understanding of where food goes once it is eaten
- Provide information about the importance of fueling our bodies with a variety of foods
- Increases awareness of the body
- Allows the child to learn through play

When it's Not Appropriate

- In a rush
- When the child is hungry or full
- Child with lack of interoception
 - understanding hunger/fullness cues



When Standard Advice isn't Appropriate

Participating in family meals can be difficult for clients who have experienced food-related trauma. Dissociation can be a result of a client's inability to improve their meals is not a "complete"



Naureen Hunani
pediatric & family nutritionist

***THERE IS NO
SHAME IN
RELYING ON
EXTERNAL CUES
TO NOURISH
YOUR BODY***

Reminding your child of the "closed kitchen policy" during meals to get them to eat more food is a form of pressure!

Naureen Hunani
pediatric & family nutritionist

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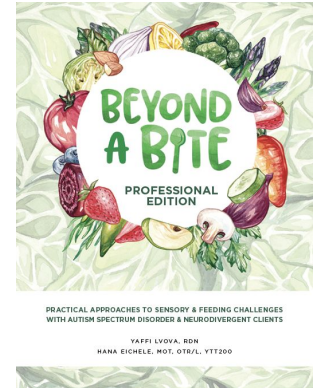
Questions?



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Thank You for Attending!

- Learn more with the [*Beyond a Bite Professional Edition: Practical Approaches to Sensory and Feeding Challenges With Autism Spectrum Disorder and Neurodivergent Clients*](#) course (16 CPEUs) at SkellySkills.com
- Sign up for our e-newsletters
 - Yaffi's at babybloomnutrition.com
 - Hana's at rootspediatrictherapy.com
- Live attendees: You'll get a link to the feedback survey in an hour/CE Cert tomorrow



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