

Milestones in Motion

GUIDING FAMILIES THROUGH FEEDING 3, 4, & 5 YEAR OLDS



Good nutrition fuels healthy growth, brain development, and key milestones. In WIC, you can help families connect their child's nutrition and feeding behaviors to developmental progress. Reviewing a milestone checklist with families can count as a nutrition education contact when you include WIC-appropriate guidance on growth and development.

Tracking and discussing nutrition-related milestones helps families support their child and identify concerns early. Developmental milestones are things most children (75% or more) can do by a certain age. Children develop at their own pace, and those born premature or with medical complexities may reach milestones on a different timeline.

AGE	NUTRITION-RELATED MILESTONE
by <u>3 Years</u>	• Uses a fork. • Avoids touching hot objects, like a stove, when you warn them.
by <u>4 Years</u>	• Serves themselves food or pours water, with adult supervision.
by <u>5 Years</u>	• Does simple chores at home, like matching socks or clearing the table after eating
<u>Advice for WIC Nutritionists:</u> Ask families how their child is doing with feeding independence like using forks, pouring, or serving themselves.	



Activities for Building Feeding Skills

WIC staff can help families connect everyday routines to healthy eating habits. To help families support their child's healthy eating and development:

- **Reinforce the family's influence.** Children learn by watching! Encourage families to eat together when possible, show enjoyment of healthy foods, and limit distractions (screens, TV, phones, etc.) during meals.
- **Model healthy habits.** Encourage families to eat with their child and show enjoyment of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and milk or water.
- **Keep consistent routines.** Recommend serving meals and snacks around the same time each day. Predictable schedules help children recognize hunger and fullness cues and reduce grazing or picky eating.
- **Support responsive feeding.** Encourage families to follow the "parent provides, child decides" approach. Parents decide what foods to offer, and children decide if and how much to eat. This builds self-regulation and reduces mealtime struggles.
- **Offer simple choices.** Promote independence by allowing children to choose between two or three nutritious options (e.g. "Would you like carrots or an apple?").
- **Invite mealtime participation.** Encourage families to involve children in safe kitchen tasks such as washing fruits and vegetables, stirring, or helping set the table. Participation builds confidence, interest in food, and coordination.
- **Build fine motor and self-help skills.** Suggest play-based activities like using playdough, cutting with safety scissors, or pouring water to strengthen hand control and coordination needed for utensil use and self-feeding.
- **Promote social and language development at meals.** Encourage families to make mealtime conversational. Talk about the food's color, taste, or where it comes from. Sharing positive mealtime conversations supports communication skills and enjoyment of food.

Advice for WIC Nutritionists:

Reinforce that independence in meals mirrors independence in other areas of development.



For more information on developmental milestones and resources to share with families, visit www.cdc.gov/ActEarly and <https://asphn.org/learn-the-signs-act-early/>.

Source: Ideas adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

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