

Saliva control

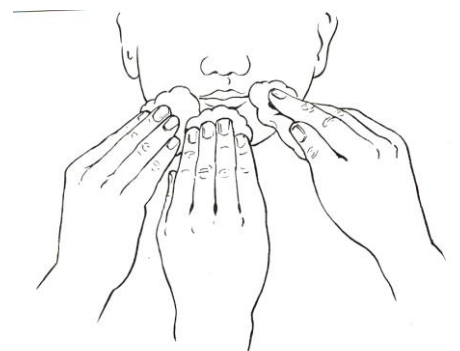
Saliva has many functions. These include:-

- Breaking down starch in foods.
- Protecting teeth and gums.
- Lubricating tongue and lips.
- Helping oral hygiene.
- Regulating mouth acidity levels.
- Helping taste

Many children find it difficult to control their saliva, so they dribble. Advice for dribbling and wiping the face:

Do:

- Do maintain your child in a good trunk and head position.
- Do show what a closed mouth is like using puppets and a mirror.
- Only dab when necessary.
- Do use a small tight wad of absorbent material that only touches their mouth and wet parts of their chin.
- Do dab your child's mouth firmly but gently, rather than wiping. Use 3 dabs along the chin (see picture).
- Reduce the amount of citrus and sweet foods they eat as these can increase saliva production.
- Keep your child's mouth clean. If there is any food in their mouth after eating, more saliva is produced to clean the mouth.



Ref: A Winstock, 1994
The Practical Management of Eating & Drinking Difficulties in Children.

Don't:

- Don't push your child's head back when dabbing their mouth.
- Don't wipe or dab their mouth suddenly, give your child a prompt so they know the cloth is coming.
- Don't expect too much. It may be unrealistic to expect saliva control during activities where they need to concentrate.
- Don't wipe using light movements as they are over stimulating and can mean more saliva is produced.

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Suggestions to help children with their saliva control:

Before working on supporting saliva control you need to make sure that your child **understands the difference between 'wet' and 'dry' sensations.**

- You can do this with clothes / sponges. Get your child to touch something and decide if it is wet or dry.

Choose a specific time to work on your child's dribbling, this could be playing a game or sharing a story.

- Get your child to relate 'wet' and 'dry' to their face, especially the chin and lips.
- If they are wet, encourage your child to swallow and dab their chin/lips firmly - 2 or 3 dabs should be enough (remember dabs not wiping as that stimulates saliva production).
- Use a mirror - Look in a mirror and encourage your child to look, see and touch their chin to decide if it's wet or dry then watch themselves swallow and dab.
- At frequent intervals during the activity, say every 20 – 30 seconds (a kitchen timer might help with this), stop what you are doing and look in the mirror. Can your child see if her face is wet or dry? If it's dry then give them praise and talk about it in a positive way. If it's wet then help them to dry their mouth, remember your Do's and Don'ts. If your child can do this themselves, please let them, giving cues on how to dab well.
- As your child becomes better at checking their face in the activity time, you could start to give them cues to do so at other times during the day, especially when you see saliva loss occurring.
- Try to talk about their dribbling in a positive way. Talk about their face being nice and dry/clean, rather than wet or dirty. It is important that your child does not feel like they are continually being told off.
- Working on saliva control needs to be done regularly and consistently if it is to be effective.
- You can support your child to remember to swallow – it can be difficult to swallow on command so it's useful to find another way to prompt this. You could choose a signal together that means they should swallow e.g. you touch your lips or chin as a reminder.

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