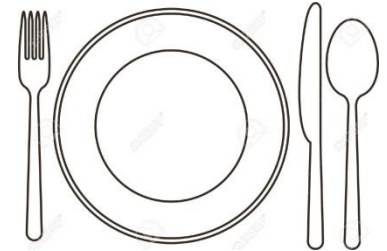


# Patient Information Leaflet

## Learning Cutlery Skills - Helpful Hints

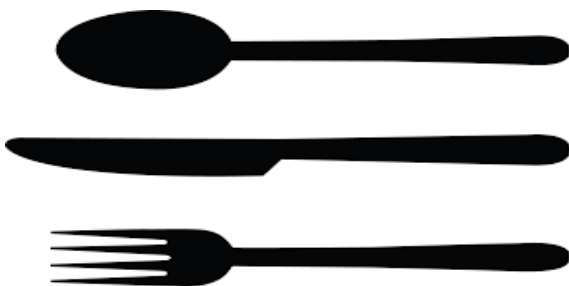


Information for Parents, Teachers and Carers

### **Which children may need support with this?**

The majority of children will learn to use a knife and fork and progress with this skill, but for some children this can be more difficult. Here are some examples of children who may need support:

- Children with delayed motor skills
- Children with co-ordination or motor-planning difficulties
- Children with low muscle tone or altered muscle tone
- Children with hypermobility
- Children with reduced attention and concentration



For more information, please contact Occupational Therapy on:

**For York and Selby Area:** 01904 726599

**For Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale Area:** 01723 342357

## Pre-Cutlery Skills

- Tearing paper (perhaps make a collage)
- Paper rubbings
- Drawing around templates
- Baking – mixing in a bowl
- Blow painting – grasping a drinks straw (try both hands)



## Helpful Hints

- Try non-slip matting (e.g. Dycem™) to stop the child's plate or bowl moving
- Plates with high sides are useful to aid a child's independence in loading their spoon or fork
- Ensure the child has a good sitting position with feet resting on the floor and the table at approx. elbow height
- If the child eats sitting on the sofa, try a lap tray with a bean-filled cushion on the underside which provides a firmer surface
- Consider the size of your cutlery – full adult size cutlery does not always fit comfortably in a child's smaller hands
- Moulded cutlery can aid finger placement e.g. Caring Cutlery, Kura Care Cutlery
- Ensure children's cutlery has a good enough blade to cut through foods to promote independence
- If the child's hands often slip down the cutlery – try placing an elastic band around the handle, and opt for a more cylindrical handle as oppose to a flat metal handle
- The typical 'British' way to hold cutlery is the knife in the right hand as right hand dominance is most prevalent – usually left-handers learn this way too

## Knife and Fork Practice

- To achieve a functional grasp, the index finger should be on top of the handle to allow downward pressure, with the other fingers curled round it
- Before trying with food, practice with Playdoh™ or plasticine.
  - Practice stabbing with a fork (and not all the way down to the plate) e.g. pick up playdough peas
  - Practice using the knife to knock playdough off the fork carefully (no fingers allowed)
  - Practice the slicing 'to and fro' action, not pushing down, and keeping the knife upright; not on an angle
  - The angle of the fork is also important. Practice keeping the fork steady and that it doesn't need to be vertical; elbows need not be held high!
  - Practice keeping the 'cutting' elbow tucked into the body – holding a beanbag against the body can help
- When progressing to cutting food, give your child opportunities to practise these skills at times other than mealtimes. Start with easy foods such as pieces of boiled potato, carrot, fish fingers, toast, pieces of fruit and cheese
- Show your child how to begin cutting a little way from, and in front of, where the fork is planted. So often children begin to cut very close to the fork and find that they are trying to cut through the prongs of the fork! Teach them to listen out for the noise that will tell them that is what is happening
- Your child may also need to practise turning the fork from the scooping position to the stabbing position and back again
- Many children find it difficult to organise the food on their plates. They may try to cut too near the edge of the plate or with the food at an awkward angle. You can help by not putting much food on the plate to start with, and giving second-helpings after some has been eaten. Show your child how to use the knife and fork to position the food in order to cut it. This can also be practised with Playdoh™

## **Tell us what you think**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

**For York and Selby Area:** 01904 724366

**For Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale Area:** 01723 342472

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Patients, relatives and carers sometimes need to turn to someone for help, advice or support. Our PALS team is here for you. PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or via email at [pals@york.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk). An answer phone is available out of hours.

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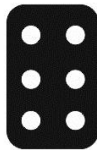
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Owner	Occupational Therapy
Date first issued	August 2017
Review Date	August 2018
Version	1 (issued August 2017)
Approved by	AB
Document Reference	HM

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