Behavior management techniques are designed to strengthen adaptive behaviors and weaken maladaptive behaviors.

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Behavioral Management of Feeding Disorders of Childhood
by Alan H. Silverman

Key insights
Addressing childhood feeding disorders is key to fostering appropriate growth and cognitive development in early life and beyond. To this end, behavioral interventions are the cornerstone of treatment. Identifying and implementing the appropriate behavioral techniques requires the cooperation between pediatricians, psychologists, and parents in order to sustain long-term positive changes. To enhance the likelihood of a successful outcome, parents or caregivers need to be educated about the theory and applications of these techniques.

Current knowledge
Childhood feeding problems include food refusal, disruptive mealtime behavior, rigid food preferences, and inability to master self-feeding skills. The prevalence of childhood feeding problems is as high as 25–45% amongst the general population. In children with developmental disabilities or those with mental disorders, these estimates are between 30 and 80%. Such feeding problems are most frequently seen in the initial 1–3 years of life and can result in nutritional conditions such as rickets and scurvy. Nutritional disorders that occur during this critical period have adverse effects on cognitive development, school performance, memory, and emotional and behavioral regulation.

Practical implications
An important first step is to identify the feeding problem in order to clarify the treatment methods and objectives. Behavioral treatment strategies are the mainstay for the management of feeding disorders and are designed to reinforce positive behaviors and minimize maladaptive behaviors. These strategies include a combination of modifications of mealtime scheduling, meal duration, and mealtime transitions, as well as positive reinforcement and discrimination training. It is important that parents and caregivers work alongside pediatric psychologists in order to understand the range of possible strategies and apply the correct type of behavioral intervention.

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