

Dribbling and Saliva Control

Saliva is necessary for a clean, healthy mouth and lubricates the tongue and lips during speech but when drooling or dribbling occurs it may cause embarrassment and have serious consequences.

What is Dribbling?

Dribbling is the unintentional loss of saliva from the mouth.

Dribbling is a normal part of a child's development. During early childhood years, increased dribbling is often linked to or exacerbated by teething or a cold.

Dribbling usually ceases by 3 to 4 years of age. No-one really knows why some children continue to dribble but it is rarely because they produce too much saliva. It is usually because they don't know how to control their saliva.

Disorders associated with poor saliva control include:

- Cerebral Palsy
- Parkinson's Disease
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Stroke

Dribbling may require investigation if it is associated with:

- Difficulty sucking, chewing, eating and swallowing
- Concerns about feeding (for example, rejecting solid foods)
- Reduced strength, control, tone or function of the muscles in the face
- Increased saliva production
- Neurological impairment
- Developmental delay
- Trouble keeping lips together
- Persistent breathing through the mouth (which may be due to a runny or blocked nose and/or continual ear infections)
- Delayed speech development
- Side effect of some medications or allergic reaction (this is rarely the cause)
- Poor posture
- Lack of awareness of the problem

What can be done to improve saliva control?

- Improve oro-motor tone, function and control
- Improve sensory awareness of face and mouth
- Improve head control and posture
- Behavioural modification programs
- Improve eating skills
- Oral appliances
- Bio-feedback tools
- Drug therapy
- Surgery

When to contact a Speech Pathologist

Do not ignore a problem with saliva control. If you are concerned, please contact a Speech Pathologist immediately. The Speech Pathologist will provide a thorough oro-motor assessment and intervention options.

If you would like more information or continue to be concerned about your/your child's progress, then contact your local Speech Pathologist

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