

Evaluation and Physical Therapy Intervention of Oral Feeding Difficulty in Preterm Infants—Literature Review

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Feeding difficulty is a common problem in preterm infants who survived at the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). The combination of neuromotor immaturity and neonatal complications may increase the risk of feeding difficulty. However, a systematic review of feeding problems and their management are needed. Physical therapists working in the NICU are frequently consulted to evaluate and treat the oral-motor problems in preterm infants. The aim of the present report was therefore to review the typical oral-motor development in full-term infants and to contrast the information with that of preterm infants. The neonatal self-regulatory behavior and the caregivers factors that may be contributing to feeding disorder were also reviewed. The evaluation of feeding difficulty in preterm infants includes taking a focused feeding history, oral-motor development assessment, and observations of infant-caregiver interactions during feeding. Beneficial evidence of the common practice skills such as oral stimulation, oral support, non-nutritive sucking practice and proper positioning in this population were also reviewed. The overview of these topics will help physical therapists understand the contributing factors of feeding difficulty and develop proper evaluation and treatment strategies for high-risk preterm infants. (FJPT 2008;33(3):188-196)

Key Words: Feeding difficulty, Preterm infants, Oromotor development, Early intervention

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