CRITICAL MOTOR & ORAL-MOTOR MILESTONES FOR FEEDING

34-42 weeks gestation:
Coordination of suck-swallow-breathe pattern emerges

2 ½ - 3 ½ months of age:
steady head control achieved

4-6 months of age:
• Reflexive sucking is replaced by learned motor patterns (active sucking)
• Downward/forward growth of mandible creates larger oral space, with tongue no longer filling the oral cavity at rest
• Anterior/posterior movement is achieved with active movement forward and backward versus via pressure changes (as with bottle/breast feeding)
• Beginning hand-to-mouth play (independent oral exploration of objects)

6-7 months of age:
• Trunk control sufficient for independent sitting for greater than 3-5 minutes
• Stable head control in sitting (no head bobbing)

7-9 months of age:
• Emerging tongue lateralization begins
• Munching (vertical jaw movement) and gnawing develops
• Lip closure supports movement of food back for a swallow

12-14 months of age:
• Active tongue lateralization
• Rotary chew emerges
• Change in taste bud perception

14-16 months of age:
• Efficient finger feeding
• Practicing utensil use versus effective use for volume

18-24 months of age:
• All oral-motor skills needed to eat any table food presented have been achieved
• Increasing utensil use (not efficient until after 24 months of age)

References Adapted From: