Eating and Drinking Ability Classification System from 3 years: descriptors and illustrations

**EDACS Level I - Eats and drinks safely and efficiently**
- Eats a wide range of different texture foods that are age appropriate
- May be challenged by some very firm bite and chew foods
- Moves food from one side of the mouth to the other; may close lips whilst chewing
- Drinks thin or thick fluids from range of cups with consecutive swallows, including through a straw
- May cough or gag for very challenging textures
- Eats and drinks at a similar speed to peers
- Retains most food or fluid in the mouth
- Clears food from most tooth surfaces and dislodges most foods from the sides of the mouth.

**EDACS Level II - Eats and drinks safely but with some limitations to efficiency**
- Eats a range of food textures that are age appropriate
- Challenged by some firm bite, effortful chew, mixed and sticky textures
- Moves food slowly from one side of the mouth to the other using the tongue
- May chew with lips open
- Drinks thin or thick fluids from most cups with consecutive swallows; may drink through a straw
- Coughs or gags on new or challenging textures or when tiring
- May sometimes cough if fluid is fast flowing or large quantity taken in the mouth
- May tire if textures challenging and mealtimes will take longer than for peers
- Loses small amounts of food or fluid especially challenging textures
- Some foods will collect on some tooth surfaces and between cheeks and gums.

**EDACS Level III - Eats and drinks with some limitations to safety; there may be limitations to efficiency**
- Eats puree and mashed food and may bite and chew some soft chew food textures
- Challenged by large lumps, firm bite and effortful chew textures which may lead to choking and reduced efficiency
- It is challenging to move food from one side of the mouth to the other, to keep food in the mouth, and to bite and chew for safe eating
- Eating and drinking performance is variable and depends upon overall physical ability, positioning or assistance given
- May drink from an open cup but drinking from cup with a lid or spout may be required to control the flow of fluid
- May drink thickened fluids more easily than thin and may need time between sips
- May choose to drink only in certain situations such as with a trusted carer or with no distractions
- Specific food textures and positioning of food in mouth are required to reduce the risk of choking
- May cough or aspirate if fluid is fast flowing or large quantity taken in the mouth
- May tire whilst eating if food requires chewing and mealtimes will be prolonged
- Food and fluid loss is likely and food will collect on tooth surfaces, roof of the mouth and between cheeks and gums.

**EDACS Level IV - Eats and drinks with significant limitations to safety**
- Eats smooth purees or well mashed food
- Challenged by food that requires chewing; choking may occur if lumps are eaten
- May at times be difficult to co-ordinate swallowing and breathing when eating and drinking as shown by signs of aspiration
- It is challenging to control the movement of food and fluid in the mouth, to control mouth opening and closure, and to control swallowing, biting and chewing
- May swallow lumps whole
- May find it easier to drink thickened fluids than thin fluids; thickened fluids taken slowly and in small quantities from an open cup may increase control whilst drinking
- May choose not to drink fluids or to drink only in certain situations such as with trusted carer
- Likely to need time between mouthfuls to swallow repeatedly before continuing
- Will require specific food textures, fluid consistency, techniques, skilled carers, positioning and modified environment to reduce risks of aspiration and choking and increase efficiency
- May tire whilst eating and mealtimes are likely to be prolonged
- Significant food and fluid loss from the mouth
- Food may become stuck on tooth surfaces, roof of the mouth and between teeth and gums
- Supplementary tube feeding may be considered.

**EDACS Level V - Unable to eat or drink safely – tube feeding may be considered to provide nutrition**
- May manage very small tastes or flavours
- Ability to manage small tastes and flavours will be affected by positioning, personal factors and environmental features
- Unable to swallow food or drink safely due to limitations to the range and co-ordination of movement for swallowing and breathing
- It is likely to be challenging to control mouth opening and tongue movement
- Aspiration and choking are very likely
- Harm from aspiration is evident
- May require suction or medication to keep airway clear of secretions
- Alternative means of providing nutrition such as tube feeding may be considered.

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