**Activity**

Continue to give your child food choices when possible and extend his language when talking during mealtimes. For example, if he says, "More crackers," you can say, "Oh, you want more crackers? Sure!" Encourage him to scoop yogurt or applesauce out of a shallow bowl and feed himself. You can use mealtimes to talk to him about the concepts of "full" and "empty" (e.g., "Your bowl is full. Now it's empty."). Allow him to safely handle real fruits and vegetables and talk about their textures (e.g., "This is an avocado. Feel how bumpy it is."). He should be more independent with drinking out of an open cup at this age, although using a sippy cup with a straw is an acceptable "on the go" option. When he's finished eating, ask him to throw away his napkin or put his plate or bowl on the counter. Doing so will teach him to follow simple directions and will also make him feel like your little helper!

**Crosswalk to Healthy Beginnings**

This activity supports development in relation to the following *Healthy Beginnings* indicators:

* Personal/Social A1;
* Language B3 & B5;
* Cognitive A2; and
* Physical A3.

**Possible Intervention Strategies & Supports**

* If your child has a hard time grasping a traditional spoon, try one with a fat, rubber grip. If needed, you can even wrap the handle of a traditional spoon in electrical tape to make it fatter and easier for him to hold on to.
* Oral-motor activities, such as blowing pinwheels and sucking thick liquids (e.g., milkshakes) through straws, strengthen children's **articulators**. Articulators are the body parts we use for speaking, such as the tongue and lips. You can also play a "race" type game to help strengthen his articulators by rubbing ice along his lips and telling him to lick off the water before it drips down his chin!
* As you offer choices, hold each choice near your mouth as you label it (e.g., "pretzel"). Put down the first choice, hold the second choice up by your mouth, and label it (e.g., "cracker"). Give your child wait time (count to 5 slowly to yourself). If he reaches for one choice, label it and say "pretzel" as you hold it near your mouth. Give the child wait time to see if she will imitate the word. If your child does not imitate, again say, "Pretzel," as you hand him the pretzel.
* Some children have sensory sensitivity to different food tastes, smells, and textures. You may help this by allowing your child to play with his food! It can also be beneficial to do mealtime warm-up activities, such as rubbing or patting the cheeks with lotion and different types of textured cloths. It may also help to "warm up the mouth" with a vibrating toothbrush before eating.

**Tips**

Most pediatricians recommend that toddlers completely give up sippy cups between 24 and 36 months of age. Using a sippy cup for too long can lead to increased risk for cavities and possible speech difficulties. A sippy cup with a straw is a better option than one with a spout though. You might notice that your child gets frustrated easily if he still has trouble with spills. This is a perfectly typical reaction to a perfectly typical behavior for this age!