

HELPING TODDLERS DEVELOP GOOD FOOD HABITS

Toddlers between one and three years of age do not need to gain much weight. So – they do not need to eat very much. Your child may become a “picky eater,” so you may become worried that she is not eating enough. Remember, this is a normal, healthy response to her decreased energy needs.

Your toddler will learn many new things during mealtimes. He will learn how to hold utensils and cups to feed himself. He will learn the taste and texture of new foods. He will learn how to know when he is hungry and when he is full.

As the parent, you are only responsible for deciding which healthy foods to offer your child. Your child should be allowed to decide what she will eat, how much she will eat – and even whether or not she will eat. Mealtimes should be enjoyable for everyone. Do not force a child to eat or to try a food. Your child will learn healthy food habits by watching you.

OFFERING NEW FOODS

1. Take advantage of the fact that one year olds enjoy putting everything in their mouths. You can use this time to offer many new, varied foods. By two years of age, most children are reluctant to try new foods.
2. Serve foods with a variety of colors, textures, flavors, and temperatures. This helps provide good nutrition and is more interesting to your toddler.
3. When introducing a new food, offer only a small amount the first time.
4. Do not give your toddler foods that are too hard, too tough, or too sticky. Avoid choking hazards.
5. Toddlers often enjoy spicy foods. Be careful, however, about salt. It is rarely necessary to add salt to toddler (or adult) foods.

HINTS FOR EASIER MEALTIMES

1. Provide a pleasant atmosphere for eating. Mealtimes should be fun and enjoyable for everyone. Try to avoid disciplining your child during meals.
2. Use plastic or other non-breakable dishes and utensils.
3. Adjust the seat so your toddler will be easily able to reach her plate.
4. Expect your toddler to be messy while learning. You can place a plastic sheet underneath the table to help with clean up.
5. Limit distractions at mealtime.
 - a. Do not have the television on while you are eating
 - b. Children who watch more than one hour of television each day are more likely to become obese. They often snack while watching television and have less physical activity.

DEVELOPING HEALTHY ATTITUDES

1. Do not force your child to eat a food he truly dislikes.
2. Offer small amounts of food at a time. Large volumes on her plate may discourage her from trying new foods.
3. Do not offer rewards for eating. Your toddler should eat because he enjoys it and because he is hungry.
4. Do not discuss your family’s food likes and dislikes in front of your toddler. Let her decide for herself.

5. Encourage your toddler to eat meals with the family. Research shows that teens who eat more meals with their families are less likely to participate in high risk behaviors. So start now and develop the habit of family mealtimes.
6. Toddlers learn by imitating you! Eat a variety of foods and your child will learn to eat a variety also.
7. Demonstrate good table manners – your toddler is watching.
8. Allow your child to feed himself as much as possible. This is one of the ways your child will learn to regulate how much food she needs.
9. Encourage outdoor activities. Your child will have a better appetite and will also use calcium better to build stronger bones.

NUTRITION

CALORIES

Toddlers will regulate their intake and eat the amount of calories they need. If you are offering healthy foods, you do not need to count calories to know if your child is eating properly. (If you are choosing a vegetarian diet for your toddler, please talk with your pediatrician or nutritionist to assure your child is receiving enough protein and calories.

FAT

Children's brains continue to grow during the second and third year of life. Since fat helps nerves develop, you should not limit the amount of fat in your child's diet. After your child is three years old, it is appropriate to limit her intake of unhealthy fats.

IRON

Toddlers often become iron deficient and anemic. Iron is extremely important for brain development, and toddlers who are iron deficient may have a more difficult time learning. The best sources of iron are found in red meat and fish, and this iron is more easily absorbed. But there are many other sources of iron, including iron-fortified cereals, beans and lentils, chickpeas, eggs, spinach and fortified breads. Foods rich in vitamin C, like citrus fruits, will help your child absorb the iron from plants. Infant iron-fortified cereal is a great source of iron, so you might consider adding infant cereal to your toddler's other foods that she enjoys.

CALCIUM

The best source of calcium is dairy products – milk, yogurt, cottage cheese, and cheese. Calcium is also found in fortified orange juice, broccoli, kale, bok choy, fortified soy products (milk, tofu). Your child needs about 700 mg of calcium each day.

JUICE and MILK

Your child should not have more than 4 ounces of juice a day.

During the second year of life, toddlers do NOT need to drink milk. They do need some of the nutrients that milk can provide, including protein, calcium and fat, but these nutrients can be obtained from other foods. Toddlers who drink milk can drink any kind of milk – whole milk or low fat, soy milk, rice milk, or almond milk. Try to limit the amount of milk your child drinks to 12 – 16 ounces a day so she will be hungry for other foods that have better nutrition. Breast feeding continues to benefit toddlers and mothers for those who choose to continue to do so.

Toddler's diets are often lacking in iron, zinc and vitamins. You may choose to give your toddler a chewable multivitamin once he can start chewing one. (The children's multivitamins are usually designed for those age 2 years and older.) Please talk with your pediatrician if you have questions about your child's nutrition.

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