

YOUR 15 MONTH OLD

What fun you must be having as you watch your 15 month old busily babbling as she plays. This is such a delightful time in your child's life – so much learning, so much exploring, and a possibly a little mischievous behavior, too. We hope this information will help you and your child continue to learn from and enjoy each other.

NUTRITION

Your toddler will not gain much weight in the next 6 months, so her appetite may decrease. She will enjoy “grazing” – eating small bites of food frequently throughout the day and will probably prefer “white” foods like grains, bread, bagels, crackers, pasta, and cereal. Toddlers have been known to pick out all the green or orange bits of food on their plates and toss them overboard.

A few guidelines for nutrition:

1. Your role in feeding your toddler should be changing. You are no longer responsible for feeding him. Instead, your responsibility is to prepare healthy foods and offer the food to your child. Your toddler will decide whether or not to eat and will choose what foods to eat.
2. Iron and calcium are very important during the second year of life. Many toddlers are not eating foods that are rich in iron, so you may want to continue giving her iron-fortified infant cereal mixed into a food like yogurt. Iron is also found in meat, chicken, turkey, spinach, eggs, lentils, and blackstrap molasses.
3. Please limit the amount of juice your toddler drinks. He should not drink more than 4 ounces a day.
4. Your toddler will change her likes and dislikes quickly – so don't buy too much of one item.
5. Your toddler will learn good food habits by watching you eat.
6. Offer fruits and vegetables every day. Even if your toddler refused broccoli one day, she may decide she likes it when offered at a different time.
7. Toddlers often enjoy vegetables if they are “crispy” or if they can dip them into something like yogurt or hummus.

Your toddler will begin learning how to use utensils, but will probably spill a lot of food. Don't expect to teach your toddler table manners quite yet. He is still learning how to use the small muscles in his hands, so he will not be very coordinated.

Remember to brush his teeth at least once a day – especially at night before bedtime. You do not need to use toothpaste. If you choose to use toothpaste, you should check whether your city water is fluoridated. If your city water is fluoridated, you should use a children's toothpaste that does NOT contain fluoride. Please check with your pediatrician if you have questions.

SLEEPING

Most 15 month olds have transitioned to taking just one nap a day, usually in the early afternoon. The need for naps can continue up through 3 years of age, and sometimes longer. (Some parents need naps, too.) By the time your toddler is 18 months old, she may start resisting going to bed at night – this is often called “bedtime refusal”. She knows that there are exciting things happening, and she doesn't want to miss out. Nighttime routines are especially helpful - so if you haven't already started a night time routine, we recommend you do so now.

The routine doesn't have to be very long – a soothing song, a few stories, a bath, or a massage. Your routine helps calm your toddler after a busy day and reminds her that it is time for bed.

Transition objects

You may also find it helpful to encourage your toddler to have a “transition object”. A transition object helps your toddler go from one situation to another and provides some emotional stability for your child. You can introduce a soft stuffed animal, a toy, a small blanket. Some toddlers have already latched on to a special object, but sometimes parents are reluctant to encourage this attachment. We think you should encourage your child's use of a transition object as it may help, not just with sleep, but with other transitions such as saying goodbye at day care. If your child uses a pacifier as her transition object, please encourage her to limit its use to naptime, nighttime, and new or stressful situations. Most of the day when she is awake, it is better to have her “pacifier free” so she is more likely to use words to communicate with you.

SAFETY

Many toddlers are now climbing, so they are able to reach new places in your home that may be dangerous. Toddlers have been known to climb up bookcases, television stands, aquariums, and any other household object you can imagine. All of these should now be bolted to a wall to avoid toppling over and injuring your toddler. Go back through your home and look at eye level to see what new dangers may face your toddler – then take the time to remedy the situation. Just some things to consider:

- Sharp knives, scissors, matches in drawers that your toddler can now reach need to be moved
- Toiletries, especially mouth wash, nail polish remover, and medications need to be placed out of reach
- House plants that are poisonous need to be placed higher or eliminated
- Doors to the outside may need a lock that is higher so toddler cannot get outside unsupervised

DEVELOPMENT

Muscles – Most toddlers are walking by now, but some children wait until closer to 18 months to take their first steps. If your child is not walking by 18 months, please talk with your pediatrician. Even if not walking, toddlers are on the move! Your home needs to be “baby proofed” as you cannot keep your eye on your child at all times any more.

Language – Toddlers are certainly showing you what they want and may also be telling you with words. Your child should have 8 – 10 words by 18 months - and if he doesn't, please talk with your pediatrician. By 15 months, your child should be doing all the following:

- showing you she hears and sees well
- pointing to make his needs known
- responding to her name
- understanding most of what you say to him
- following a one step command without you pointing “Give me your shoes”
- beginning to play with toys in an imaginative way – talking on the telephone, making cars go “zoom” on the floor, feeding a doll

If your child is not doing all of these, please talk with your pediatrician.

PARENTING

15 month olds are so much fun since they are understanding what you say, can communicate with you, and are learning how to be independent. They know how to make you laugh and respond to them, and they can be cute and mischievous. But rapidly they can change to defiant, screaming toddlers who cannot decide what they want. This quick transition in emotions is absolutely normal and does not indicate any problem in development. It is easy to understand these emotional shifts, if you remember they are learning so much and figuring out how to operate in our world, while having limited language skills.

TEACHING TOOLS

There are many different teaching tools that you can use at this age.

1. Praising behavior that is acceptable. "I appreciate seeing how you cleaned up your toys."
2. Offering choices. "Would you like the cheese or the peanut butter sandwich?"
3. Distraction. Offering other options that will capture her attention
4. Practicing appropriate behavior when your child is in a good mood. "Let's practice how to touch the baby with a soft, slow touch."
5. Giving information. "Instead of whining, use your quiet voice."
6. Ignoring your child. When he whines again, remind him to use his quiet voice. Then walk away. If he changes his tone of voice and stops whining, immediately pay attention to him. He will learn that whining will not bring him your attention.
7. Changing your tone of voice. Children pay more attention to your facial expressions and your tone of voice than they pay to your words. If you want your child to stop a behavior, make sure your face and tone of voice show you are serious. Don't smile when telling your child to stop a behavior. That will confuse her.
8. Don't ask a question if you are really telling your child what to do. Don't say, "Shall we leave the park now?" if you really are saying it is time to leave. Asking a question means the child can answer with "no".
9. Give the child an advance notice of a change. "In 5 minutes we will need to leave the park." This lets your child know that her activity will be ending – even though she doesn't understand the concept of 5 minutes.
10. Express emotions. Since your toddler probably cannot say the words, express your child's emotions for him. "I know you are disappointed we have to leave the park." "I see how frustrated you are." Your child will often respond positively when he knows you understand what he is feeling. This is also good teaching so he will learn to express his emotions later on.
11. **A very important teaching tool that you can start soon is "Time Out". This is the only teaching tool that will allow your child to learn how to develop self-control. Please see the Time Out handout on "Prescriptions for Parents" for more information.**

We hope these ideas will help you fill your "teaching tool kit". As your child learns what is appropriate behavior, you will see that she is happier – and you can enjoy each other even more.

TOILETING

You are probably thinking – “Isn’t it too soon to think about toilet learning?” The ideas on toilet learning vary tremendously. Some families and professionals promote infant communication and begin having diaper free moments with infants less than 6 months old. Others in our society are waiting until children are 2 ½ to 3 years of age to begin toilet learning. No matter your philosophy, there are certainly things that you can be doing now that will help your child learn the concept of using the toilet.

1. Since children’s brains learn so much by imitation – let your child see you using the toilet. Talk with him to explain what you are doing. “Daddy is using the toilet. When you are a big boy, you can use the toilet, too.”
2. Read books about toileting to your child
3. Consider buying a small potty that can sit on the floor. Then your child can explore and experiment with the potty. She can even sit on it with her clothes on.
4. Consider allowing some “diaper free” time so your toddler can see what happens if she urinates. (You may want to confine this diaper free time to the bathroom, just before baths.)
5. Talk about how nice it is to have a clean diaper after you change him.
6. Let her see you putting her bowel movement into the toilet after a diaper change – and let her help you flush the toilet.

Toilet learning at this age just means you are providing information to your child. You are not expecting anything of him. Please never force your child to sit on the toilet. If you force your child, you will probably cause difficulties with toilet training.

If you have concerns about any of these topics or about your parenting, please talk with your pediatrician.

Used with permission: Jane E. Anderson, M.D. “Prescriptions for Parents”