

YOUR DELIGHTFUL 18 MONTH OLD

Your 18 month old is a wonderful combination of energy, enthusiasm, expanding knowledge and stubbornness. She is trying to learn all about the world and how she can function in it. Every day is a new day of learning and discovering. She will try to do many new things, explore everything in sight, and copy everything you do. Because she is learning so much, this is an important time to begin teaching her your values.

NUTRITION

Your toddler will not be gaining much weight in the next 6 months, so his appetite may decrease. He 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. 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.

A few guidelines for nutrition:

1. If your toddler has her molar teeth, consider giving her a chewable multivitamin with minerals (especially calcium and iron). Most vitamins are made so that a 2 year old child would take one tablet a day. Since your child is not yet two years old, you might give her one every other day.
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 and blackstrap molasses.
3. 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.

TOILET LEARNING

Your toddler is just beginning to feel when she is having a bowel movement, so don’t expect her to be potty trained yet. Here are some ideas that may help your toddler learn about using the toilet:

1. She may be showing interest in the toilet and wanting to flush it. Let her help you.
2. Let her see you using the toilet. Tell her that when she is a “big girl”, she will use the toilet, too.
3. Decide what words you are going to use for urine and stool.
4. If you do not already have a toddler’s toilet, this would be a good time to obtain one and let her sit on it - even with her clothes on. Practicing should be fun.
5. When you change her diaper, remind her that it feels nice when she is clean and dry.

Toddlers usually do not eat enough fiber to keep their bowel movements soft, so they often become constipated. If your toddler has firm, hard stools, he may associate pain with toileting and may become afraid of using the toilet. You will want to avoid this situation by making sure your toddler has soft bowel movements. There are several ways you can help your toddler have softer stools:

1. Encourage your toddler to drink water
2. Decrease the amount of cow’s milk your toddler is drinking as milk may sometimes cause constipation
3. Add 1 – 2 teaspoons of flax seed oil to a food your child likes (yogurt, for example)
4. “P” fruits (peaches, plums, pears, prunes) will also help soften your child’s bowel movements

SLEEPING

18 month toddlers often resist going to bed. They are so excited about exploring the world that they do not want to stop. A night time routine will help your child make the transition from a busy day to a quiet time and will help prepare her for sleep. You can read her a story, sing a quiet song, or give her a massage. Anything that is soothing will be helpful. Your child may also want to take a “transition object” to be with him. Transition objects are things like stuffed animals, blankets, and pacifiers that toddlers use to help themselves adjust to new situations. Transition objects are very helpful

and allow the toddlers to comfort themselves. You may also find that your child will go to bed more easily if he can listen to a story or songs on a CD.

Your toddler may also wake up at night. This may be due to nightmares that can start at this age, to other fears (like the fear of the dark), or may just be your child's way of rehearsing all the new things she has learned during the day. You may find it helpful to use a nightlight.

DEVELOPMENT "The terrible twos"

You will notice that your child has more times when she appears agitated, frustrated, or angry. She may become upset over little things that are not done quite right or exactly the way she wants. She will tell you "no" to an offered item, but then cry when you put it away. What has happened to your previously delightful, happy little baby?

Your toddler is experiencing a number of internal conflicts now. Here are just a few of his conflicts:

1. Your toddler desperately wants to be just like you. He wants to copy everything you do – sweep, shave, wash the floor. At the same time, he needs to prove to you that he is a very different person from you. Up until his first birthday, he viewed himself as a part of you. He did not realize you both were different people. Now, his development task is to learn that he is a unique person. The best way he can show you that he is different from you is to say "no" to you. He will say "no" even when he actually means "yes". You can help him through this difficult time by offering him several choices. "Would you like a cheese or peanut butter sandwich?" This will decrease the times he has to say "no".
2. Your toddler also wants to explore everything. She can run and climb now, and so she knows she can go exploring by herself. She is learning, however, that the world she is exploring can sometimes be frightening and dangerous. The dog she sees can bark and scare her. She can trip and fall when climbing. So, although she will often run ahead of you and seem to ignore you, she will also come back to you frequently to make sure that you are still there to take care of her. You may even find her becoming a little more clingy than she was in the past, pulling at your pant legs or skirt to assure herself you are there. Be patient with her and reassure her you will take care of her.
3. Toddlers believe that the world revolves around them – they are the most important people in the world. However, they will need to learn there are rules that are important for them to obey. Your child cannot hit another child to take the child's toy, for example.

All these conflicts (and others) contribute to the "terrible twos" – the second year of life. She may begin to have temper tantrums to demonstrate her frustration or anger. Temper tantrums usually happen for one of three reasons:

1. Your child is hungry or tired. If this is the case, hopefully you will feed your toddler or allow her the opportunity to go to sleep. You can often prevent temper tantrums by making sure you keep healthy snacks with you.
2. Your child is frustrated in her problem solving skills. She may not be able to place the puzzle piece in correctly. Help her problem solve by saying, "Let's try it a different way."
3. Your child is frustrated or angry because she did not get what she wanted. There are several possible responses. It is helpful to acknowledge your child's emotion. "I see you are very upset that I did not give you the cookie." Then explain, "I cannot hear you when you are screaming. I can listen when you are ready to talk nicely." You may then want to leave the room to allow your child to calm down.

If you have not yet taught your toddler how to use "time out", please ask your pediatrician for that handout. Time out allows toddlers the opportunity to settle themselves, to learn to obey you, and most importantly, to learn self-control. As your toddler learns to obey you, he will also be learning how to obey his teacher. The second year of life is a very important time for learning these concepts.

SHARING Toddlers will not naturally share with other children. They would rather have everything for themselves – and one of their favorite words is "mine". Please do not expect your toddler to share with others. You can help him learn to share by giving him two pieces of food and asking him to share one piece with another parent or child. At this age, your child should always have one item for himself before he is asked to share with another person.

TELEVISION – VIDEOS – COMPUTER GAMES / smart phones Please do not allow your toddler to spend more than 30 minutes a day in front of a "screen". Too much "screen" time may cause later difficulties for your child. Children who spend more than one hour a day in front of a screen have shorter attention spans, are less creative, spend less time outdoors and less time playing and exercising, and are more likely to have problems with obesity and aggressive behavior.

Many pediatricians check for anemia and lead levels at this age. Ask your pediatrician if you have concerns.

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