

Healthy Eating for Toddlers

(2-3 YEARS)



PROMOTING HEALTHY EATING HABITS FOR TODDLERS

As your child approaches the toddler years, they are becoming more independent, and that independence extends to their diet and eating habits.

This independence shows in many ways—by two years old your child will be able to use a spoon, drink from a cup and feed themselves a variety of finger foods. Your child may start to show more food preferences and use their growing communication skills to voice those preferences. It is important not to let mealtime become a battle between parent and child.

Promoting healthy eating habits for your child now will lay a foundation of good nutrition habits for life.

HEALTHY EATING BASICS FOR TODDLERS

- Nurture your child's independence by offering a variety of foods for them to choose from. Remember that your child can only choose from what is offered to them, so if you offer healthy options, they will eat healthy foods.
- Many toddlers will eat frequently—3 meals per day plus one or two snacks. Some meals are small, and some snacks are large. Focus less on the amount of food your child eats at each sitting and more on offering a variety of healthy foods. Your child will eat when they are hungry.
- Avoid mealtime battles. Decide what you will serve and stick to it. Let your child choose what is on their plate and how much they will eat. If your child does not want to eat all or part of a meal, do not make them a separate meal.
- Try to stick to regular meal and snack times and avoid “grazing” or snacking in between. Expect that your child may eat very little at some meals and devour other meals.
- Expect that your child may eat a certain food on one day and then refuse the same food on another day. Food refusal is usually more about the child's developmental phase and less about like or dislike of a particular food. Try not to label foods as “good” “bad” “yucky” or “favorites.” Offer your child healthy choices each day and allow them to choose which of those foods to eat on a particular day.



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- Toddlers like to feed themselves, so offer finger foods whenever possible rather than those that require a fork or spoon. Avoid foods that are too hard or too big because your child may choke on them. These foods are choking hazards: hot dogs, whole grapes, nuts, popcorn, hard candies, large chunks of peanut butter (instead spread the peanut butter thin on a cracker or bread) or raw crunchy vegetables such as carrots or celery.
- Mealtime is a social time. Sitting together as a family for meals helps your child develop important social skills, table manners, and encourages them to slow down and pace their feeding, rather than gulp their food to rush away from the table and get back to playtime. This reduces the risks of choking and helps your child learn to pace themselves and recognize when they are full.
- Keep trying new foods! It can take 10-20 exposures to a new food before a child decides to try it, so don't stop offering a food to your child just because they haven't tried it before. It can take 10-20 tries after that before a child decides if they actually like a food, so again, keep offering those new foods. Talk about new foods in a positive way, without bias, and be a role model for your child. They are unlikely to eat their vegetables if you don't eat yours.

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