

Building Blocks to Helping Toddlers Eat Well



Why Toddlers Can Be Fussy Eaters

- Toddlers know that they are a separate person. Testing limits set by their parents allows toddlers to become independent, capable members of their families.
- Toddlers recognize new people, places, and foods as unfamiliar and possibly dangerous. They need many times of examining and testing new foods before actually eating them. Once they find an acceptable food, they may want to eat only that food. These “food jags” are normal and not dangerous for healthy toddlers.
- The growth rate of toddlers is much slower than that of infants. Their appetites decrease and their food consumption moderates to match their slower rate of growth.



Setting the Stage for Success

- Parents can help their cautious toddlers become good eaters of many foods by taking a few simple steps.
- Have regularly scheduled meal and snack times. Toddlers need to eat three meals each day with planned snack times about halfway between meals. Expect children to cooperate with the schedule.
- Provide child-sized eating utensils and plates or bowls with deep rims.
- Position the toddler so that the elbows are at table height and the feet supported.
- Turn off the TV and VCR and sit down to eat or keep company with the toddler; they'll eat better.
- Limit fruit juice to no more than 8 oz. and milk to no more than 16-24 oz. each day. Large amounts of fruit juice and milk prevent hunger for other foods and cause diarrhea and iron deficiency anemia.
- Offer water between snacks and meals to satisfy thirst. If milk intake is adequate, water is a great choice.



Getting the Right Amount of Food

Serving toddlers the right size portions of foods helps them be successful eaters by not overwhelming them (Dietz & Stern, 1999).

2 Meat/Fish/Legume servings

- ✓ 2 Tbsp ground meat
- ✓ ½ egg any size
- ✓ 1 oz meat or tofu
- ✓ 1-2 Tbsp cooked peas, beans, lentils
- ✓ 1 Tbsp peanut butter (smooth only) spread thin on bread or a cracker

Fats and oils to taste

- ✓ About 30% of toddler calories should be from fat to support brain growth

5 Fruit/Vegetable servings

- ✓ ½ piece fresh fruit
- ✓ 1 Tbsp cooked vegetable for each year of age
- ✓ ¼ cup canned fruit

6 Grain servings

- ✓ ¼ to ½ slice bread
- ✓ 4 Tbsp cooked cereal, rice, pasta
- ✓ ¼ cup dry cereal
- ✓ 1-2 crackers

2-3 Dairy servings

- ✓ 1/3 cup yogurt
- ✓ ½ oz cheese (one 1" cube)
- ✓ ½ cup milk (whole for 12-24 months, low fat or skim over 24 months)



Pleasing the Picky

Toddlers have fewer teeth than adults and cannot chew as well as do adults; young children find moist, and soft foods easier to eat. Toddler appetites and food intake normally vary a lot from day to day.

- ✓ Offer foods that have an adequate but not too high fat content. Fat improves moisture and flavor.
- ✓ Offer new or disliked foods at the same time as a food your child usually likes.
- ✓ Have bread available at the table in addition to another starchy food such as pasta or potatoes
- ✓ Have favorite foods sometimes but not always.
- ✓ Honor your child's preferences in form, texture, and temperature of foods
- ✓ Make food attractive and interesting through use of color, sauces, shape, and presentation
- ✓ Offer dessert as part of the meal, but only one serving



Passing Up the Pitfalls

Ellyn Satter's (2000) two essential rules for raising children who are pleasant at the dinner table and competent eaters of a variety of healthy foods are:

- **Rule 1: Parents are responsible for what, when and where children eat.**
- **Rule 2: Children are responsible for whether or not to eat and how much to eat.**

Never:

- ✓ Force your child to eat anything or clean his or her plate
- ✓ Eat everything before giving dessert
- ✓ Omit giving regularly scheduled, healthy snacks as a bridge between meals
- ✓ Give your child a snack whenever it is demanded
- ✓ Regularly prepare special food
- ✓ Become your child's short order cook
- ✓ Urge one more bite on a full child
- ✓ Give food as a bribe or reward
- ✓ Permit your child to behave poorly at the table.
- ✓ Scold messy eating; skill in eating improves with practice.



Eating Safely

- ✓ Toddlers should sit while eating and the feeding atmosphere should be calm to help avoid choking from excitement and play.
- ✓ Avoid feeding small, hard foods that can cause choking: nuts, hard candy, jelly beans, popcorn, raw vegetables, seeds, whole grapes, chunks of meat or any other food, globs of peanut butter.
- ✓ Safe snack choices include: sliced fruits or cut up pieces with pits removed, cut up dried fruits, raisins, cooked & cut up vegetables, grated or diced cheese, yogurt, cottage cheese, crackers, cut up bagel
- ✓ Be aware that the child is eating to provide first aid for choking



