



5 tips for feeding toddlers

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Feeding toddlers doesn't have to be stressful. So many parents of toddlers feel the frustrations of feeding their picky, unpredictable and stubborn little ones. Here are a few points to keep in mind when feeding toddlers:

1. TODDLERS DON'T NEED MUCH FOOD In the first year of life the growth curve is very steep, and parents get used to their children gaining a lot of weight every time they visit the doctor. After the first year, however, the growth curve flattens considerably. Toddlers don't grow as fast, so they don't NEED a lot of food. Many parents expect children at this age need more food than they do, and they get frustrated when their kids don't meet their expectations. If you lower your expectations you won't be so disappointed when they turn your nose up at the food you offer! Since they are not eating much, make every calorie count toward offering the most nutrition.

2. TODDLERS EAT UNPREDICTABLY Remember they don't need much food. They also don't need food all the time. I see so many kids snacking continuously at home, in the car and when they are playing. This constant eating pattern sets up a habit in which kids are over-snacking. Just make food available when you normally eat, and if they are not hungry, don't force them to eat. If they eat a big breakfast and are not hungry for lunch, that okay. Kids need to learn their own hunger cues and how to eat when they need food, not when other people tell them to eat.

3. DON'T GET ON THE "JUICE TRAIN!" There is an epidemic of tooth decay and obesity in preschoolers. Largely these two problems are fueled by JUICE. Just because it's fruit, it doesn't mean it's good for you. Juice has roughly the same sugar content as a soda and not much nutrition either. Get your kids drinking WATER, which is a habit that will help keep them healthy throughout their lives. If you do offer juice, serve it ONLY with meals and keep it to less than 4-6 oz. a day. To lessen the stress of having to say no to more juice, just don't buy it or keep it in the house. Instead let juice be an occasional treat that kids are allowed to have at a birthday party, for example. Even though juice may still be a WIC approved item, it's one that should be SKIPPED!

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4. DON'T GET ON THE "JUNK FOOD TRAIN" Too many foods marketed to toddlers have added sugar (83% in one study), even though added sugar is not recommended until after age 2. Many parents offer toddler foods like crackers, puffs, yogurt snacks, and fruit-flavored snacks because they are desperate to get their children to eat, without knowing they may be too high in salt, sugar, and fat. Similarly, they may let their toddlers fill up on milk when they refuse to eat. When we offer too many filler foods or too much milk (more than 2-3 cups a day) instead of nutritious whole foods, we are teaching kids to fill up on easy, empty calories and taking away the hunger they need to practice healthier foods. Remember, it may take a dozen times for a child to learn to love a new food. Start this process of exposure to nutritious food early, so that by the time they go to preschool they have already begun to love healthy food.

5. MAKE HEALTHY FOOD FUN AND

APPEALING Take advantage of the fact that vegetables and fruit are colorful and beautiful. Put small quantities of a variety of foods on a pretty tray. Use fun shapes and dips to encourage kids to taste. Offer foods in small, manageable, bite-sized pieces. Model healthy eating by showing how much you enjoy these foods. Even better, make food appealing by getting toddlers involved. Even small children can help rinse and scrub veggies. Check out the post titled "Ten Ideas for Finger Foods for Babies and Toddlers" on doctoryum.org for more ideas. Take a deep breath and know when you make good whole foods available to most toddlers they will eat enough to grow AND will in time develop the taste for a healthy diet!



For more ideas on understanding how to raise a toddler into an adventurous eater, including how to get toddlers involved in the kitchen, check out Dr. Yum's book "Raising a Healthy, Happy Eater" co-authored with feeding specialist Melanie Potock. It covers a lot of great eating strategies for children from birth to school age.

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