



Toddler Mealtime Tips

Helping Your Child Build Healthy Eating Habits

Toddlers are learning about independence—including at mealtime! It's normal for their appetite to vary from day to day, and many toddlers go through phases of selective eating. A calm, consistent approach can help create positive mealtime experiences.

What Is Normal for Toddlers?

It is common for toddlers to:

- ✓ Eat a lot one day and very little the next.
- ✓ Prefer familiar foods.
- ✓ Need repeated exposure before trying new foods.
- ✓ Become more independent.
- ✓ Want to feed themselves.
- ✓ Take time to warm up to new foods.

Remember: Your child's appetite naturally slows after their first birthday as growth becomes more gradual.

10 Tips for More Successful Mealtimes

1. Keep a Routine

Offer meals and snacks at approximately the same times each day.

Aim for:

- **3 meals**
- **2–3 planned snacks**

A predictable schedule helps toddlers come to the table hungry and ready to eat.



2. Eat Together

Whenever possible, enjoy meals as a family.

Children learn by watching others eat.

Model:

- Trying new foods
 - Good table manners
 - Enjoying a variety of foods
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3. Offer, Don't Pressure

Your job is to decide:

- **What** to serve
- **When** to serve it
- **Where** to eat

Your child's job is to decide:

- **Whether** to eat
- **How much** to eat

Avoid forcing, bribing, or negotiating bites.

4. Keep Portions Small

Large portions can feel overwhelming.

Start with small amounts and let your child ask for more if they're still hungry.

5. Include One "Safe" Food

Offer at least one food your child usually enjoys along with new or less familiar foods.

This helps your child feel comfortable while encouraging exploration.



6. Keep Mealtimes Positive

Avoid:

- ✗ Power struggles
- ✗ Criticism
- ✗ Pressure
- ✗ Comparing siblings

Instead:

- ✓ Encourage conversation.
- ✓ Smile.
- ✓ Enjoy time together.

7. Limit Distractions

Turn off:

- Television
- Tablets
- Phones

Children eat and communicate better when they can focus on the meal and family interaction.

8. Offer New Foods Again and Again

It often takes **10–20 or more exposures** before a child accepts a new food.

Exposure can include:

- Looking
- Touching
- Smelling
- Licking
- Tasting

Progress happens in small steps.



9. Let Your Child Help

Toddlers love being involved.

They can:

- Wash fruits and vegetables
- Stir ingredients
- Pour pre-measured items
- Set the table
- Carry napkins
- Choose between two healthy options

Children are often more willing to taste foods they helped prepare.

10. Celebrate Small Successes

Praise effort instead of focusing on how much your child eats.

Try saying:

- "You touched the broccoli!"
- "Great job smelling your new food!"
- "You took a tiny taste!"

Small victories lead to bigger successes.

Foods to Offer Often

Aim for a variety of foods from all food groups:

 Fruits

 Vegetables

 Protein

 Whole grains

 Dairy (or appropriate alternatives)

 Water throughout the day

Remember, balance happens over the course of a week—not at every meal.



Avoid These Common Mistakes

- ❌ Using dessert as a reward
 - ❌ Preparing a separate meal every time your child refuses dinner
 - ❌ Allowing constant grazing throughout the day
 - ❌ Offering milk or juice immediately before meals
 - ❌ Expecting your child to finish everything on their plate
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When Should I Be Concerned?

Talk with your pediatrician or a feeding specialist if your child:

- Eats fewer than about 20 different foods.
- Regularly eliminates foods without replacing them.
- Gags, coughs, or chokes while eating.
- Refuses entire food groups.
- Has poor weight gain or growth concerns.
- Mealtimes routinely last longer than 30–45 minutes.
- Shows significant anxiety, fear, or distress around eating.

Early support can make mealtimes more enjoyable for the whole family.

Remember

- ♥ Your toddler's appetite will naturally change from day to day.
 - ♥ Stay calm, stay consistent, and keep offering a variety of foods.
 - ♥ Healthy eating habits develop over time—not overnight.
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Parent Tip

Think "one meal for the whole family." Rather than preparing separate meals, serve the same family meal with at least one familiar food your toddler enjoys. This encourages flexibility, reduces mealtime stress, and helps children become more confident eaters over time.