

Understanding Your Toddler:

Tips for Helping Toddlers Eat



Your toddler's appetite changes from day to day or even meal to meal.

Every child will refuse foods sometimes. It is a normal part of growing up. Understanding why your toddler behaves the way he does can make mealtime easier.



Your toddler is growing more slowly.

What You May See:

- Some days she barely eats anything.
- She does not eat as much as other children.
- She does not finish her food.
- She was eating more and more, but the amount has not increased lately.

Tips to Try:

- Watch for cues to know when she is hungry and full. Try not to worry about how much she eats at each meal.
- Offer a variety of healthy foods each day and throughout the week.
- Start by offering one small portion. Offer more if she finishes and shows you she is still hungry.



Your toddler is getting better at remembering things.

What You May See:

- He will not try new foods.
- He will only eat a few foods.
- He will not eat whole groups of foods, such as green vegetables.
- He prefers milk, juice, or other drinks over foods.
- He will not let anyone else feed him.

Tips to Try:

- Keep favorite foods that are not offered at mealtime out of sight.
- Offer foods many times, but do not pressure him to eat them. It is important for him to see, smell, and touch foods, even if he does not taste them.
- Be patient! It may take time for him to get used to new foods.



Your toddler likes routines.

What You May See:

- He will not eat unless he has his specific plate or bowl.
- He often fusses when fed in a different place than usual.
- He cries when given food instead of his bottle.

Tips to Try:

- Use a simple mealtime routine that works for you and your family.
- Be consistent when creating a new routine. It will take time for your toddler to learn the new steps.
- Ask WIC for more information about using routines to help your toddler be calm and cooperative.



Your toddler is learning about food and how to use her fingers to feed herself.

What You May See:

- She makes a mess with the food.
- She refuses to eat from the spoon.
- She wants to feed herself.
- She plays with food instead of eating.
- She drops the food on the floor.

Tips to Try:

- Try giving her foods that she can safely pick up and eat with her fingers.
- Let her have time to explore new foods. She will be more likely to try them later.
- Keep a damp washcloth nearby during meals and snacks for quick cleanup.



Your toddler must practice new skills, like standing, walking, and running.

What You May See:

- She will not sit still.
- She does not like to eat in the high chair.

Tips to Try:

- Give your toddler lots of time to practice new skills throughout the day.
- Make mealtime social! Talking to her while she is in her high chair may help her sit still.



Your toddler cannot always ignore the sights and sounds around him.

What You May See:

- He does not pay attention to eating.
- He prefers snacking instead of full meals.
- He takes too long to eat.
- He would rather play with the phone than eat.

Tips to Try:

- Limit noisy distractions during mealtime. For example, if he is distracted by the TV, he may not be able to focus on eating.
- Keep the phone and other items he cannot play with out of sight.
- Sit close to him and talk about the food he is eating.