



Feeding fussy toddlers

Aged 1 to 2 years

Remember...

This is the time to encourage healthy eating habits, so ensure that you set a good example!

Parents often become concerned their child is not eating enough and frustrated that everything they prepare is refused.

Remember that your child does not grow as quickly after 12 months as in the first year of life. This may mean their appetite will not be as large.

A toddler is also more capable of expressing likes and dislikes. This is the age of independence!

What to expect

Typical toddlers:

- Like to explore with food. This doesn't always mean eating it.
- Like to try to be independent. 'No' becomes a favourite word. Inconsistency is common. A food that was a favourite yesterday may be rejected today.
- Like a sense of security. Toddlers need structure, routines and limits. This makes them feel more secure. Toddlers need to eat regularly. Offer small serves of nutritious food 5-6 times a day. Studies have shown that a child may need to see a new food 6-7 times before they taste it.
- Have a limited attention span
- Like to watch and imitate people around them. Eat with your child and eat the same food. This may be a time to reassess your own food choices.
- Have a varied appetite because of growth spurts and activity. Appetites also vary a lot from one child to the next. Use the general health and growth of your child as a guide that they are eating enough.

Helpful tips

The guidelines below may be useful if you are having trouble feeding your toddler. They may also help to prevent feeding difficulties later on:

- Make meals and snacks look appealing. Using a range of colours, food and shapes can make meals look more interesting. Foods should also be easy to chew and easy to handle.
- Vary how a food is served to improve its acceptance e.g. mashed potato might be better accepted than boiled potato.
- Encourage your child to eat with you, or the rest of the family. Children learn by imitating others, especially caring adults.
- Eating with friends can encourage eating a wider variety of foods.
- Do not force-feed your child. Respect that they may have certain likes and dislikes and give them some choice in selecting food. For example, let them choose between two types of fruit, or two sandwich fillings.
- Be consistent with how you handle food refusal.
- Get your child excited about food. Involve them in buying and preparing food.
- Avoid substituting uneaten meals for other foods. Treating your child with unhealthy foods because you are worried they are not eating only makes them less likely to eat healthier foods. Only buy and offer healthy foods.
- Do not feel guilty if your child will not eat the food that is offered.
- Set aside 20-30 minutes for meal times and 10-20 minutes for snacks.
- Serve an amount you know your child can finish.
- Avoid distractions such as TV, toys and games.
- Give plenty of positive encouragement.
- Keep mealtimes as calm and relaxed as possible. Avoid family arguments at mealtimes!

- Serve a new food with a favourite food.
- Do not bribe children with food.
- Avoid drinks or snacks within one hour of mealtimes.
- Plain water is the best drink for children. If used at all, limit cordial and fruit juice to once a day.
- Large amounts of milk (e.g. over 600mls/day) can fill your child up and result in a picky eater.
- Children do not need special foods. By this age they should be eating the same sort of meals as the rest of the family.

More information

If you would like more information on your child's development or if you are concerned about your child, contact your local child health nurse.

You could also ask at your local library for books on child development.

Acknowledgement

This fact sheet is consistent with current Infant Feeding Guidelines and Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia, as produced by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

It is also based on information drawn heavily from:

- Infant and Toddler Feeding Guide, Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Royal Children's Hospital and Health Service District, 2004.
- Breastfeeding: A Simple Guide to Help You Establish Breastfeeding, Community Child Health Service, Royal Children's Hospital and Health Service District, 2004.
- Growing Strong: Feeding You and Your Baby, Public Health Services, Queensland Health, 2003.
- Optimal Infant Nutrition: Evidence Based Guidelines 2003-2008, Queensland Health, 2003.

This fact sheet is the result of input and effort from many health professionals in Queensland. Their help with the content is greatly appreciated.

To access the full set of fact sheets, go to <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/child&youth/factsheets>.