

Nutrition

Remember this year is an important time when your child develops food preferences that may predict their eating preferences for life. A recent study of toddler diets found that as early as 12 months, children's diets begin mirroring some of the unhealthy eating patterns seen in older children and adults including eating limited fruits and vegetables and consuming too much sugar and fat. It is important that as parents we provide a variety of healthy, nutritious foods at mealtime and snack-time to avoid developing an unhealthy eating pattern for your child. Families have a tremendous influence on developing their children's food preferences.

Here are a few tips:

- **Children thrive with structure and predictability.** This fosters a sense of security for your child. A set schedule of 3 meals and 2–3 snacks per day should be part of your child's diet. **Having a set time for meals and snacks is an important part of your child's routine.** With set times for meals and snacks you can avoid your child grazing throughout the day. Grazing can lead to an unhealthy eating pattern.
- **"Parents provide and the child decides."** This is an important, easy-to-remember expression for us as parents. **As a parent, our job is to provide optimal nutrition for our child.** Parents are responsible for what the family eats, when the family eats, and where the family eats. Your child's job is to decide how much of the correct portion to eat. **Children are responsible for whether they eat what is offered or wait until the next meal/snack.** Picky eating and food refusal (or "food jags"—liking something one day and not the next) are normal parts of your child's development, but as parents we need to avoid falling into a pattern of offering only what the child "likes" or offering less nutritious alternative foods because your child refuses what is offered to them.
- One way to remember how to give your child nutritious, healthful choices are to **utilize the MyPlate visual diagram** to include all 5 food groups in meals and snacks. **For the 3 meals of the day try to make half their plate fruits and vegetables.** Remember: it can take several times of presenting a vegetable before a child will eat it. Never force a child to eat a vegetable—this will just create a battle and control issue—and try not to reward a child eating their vegetables with dessert. Remember: the **child decides** how much to eat. **Parents decide** to keep offering it to them. For more information and tips please visit **ChooseMyPlate.gov**.
- **Snacks:** Today, the most popular snack choices among toddlers and preschoolers are crackers, cookies, and candy. But, children's stomachs are small and they will not eat very much at each meal, so **snacks should be thought of as "mini-meals"** and fruits, vegetables, and protein are better choices for snack times to keep your child's diet healthy. Sweets can be part of a healthy diet, but they should be thought of as an occasional treat and not a daily part of their diets.
- **"Good nutrition is a family affair."** **Parents are the most important role model for their children.** Look down at your own plate and see what types of food you're modeling for your child to eat. Try to have your own plate resemble the MyPlate diagram so that your child can see you eat and enjoy the foods you're encouraging them to eat. 6. **5-2-1-0:** This is an easy-to-remember message to help promote a healthy lifestyle starting TODAY:
 - **5:** Remember to serve your child at least 5 servings of fruits & vegetables per day.
 - **2:** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends less than 2 hours of screen time (TV, video games, recreational computer time, iPad, iPhones) per day for children over 2 years of age. It is recommended that children under 2 have no screen time. Ways to encourage this are to turn the TV off during meals and keep the TV and computer in a central location of the house and out of a children's bedrooms.
 - **1:** Provide at least 1 hour of physical activity for your child per day. At this age, the most enjoyable way to encourage this is to just let your child have supervised outdoor play.
 - **0:** Water and milk (you and your pediatrician can decide if whole or lower-fat milk are best for your child) are the best drinks for your child. Soda, sports drinks, fruit drinks, and even 100% fruit juice all contain a large amount of sugar, so try to provide almost no sugared-sweetened beverages for your child. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting the amount of 100% juice in your child's diet to no more than 4–6 ounces per day for children 1 to 6 years of age.

For more information on how to encourage healthy habits for children 0–5 years of age, please visit:
www.healthychildren.org/growinghealthy

Care of Your Child

- **Dental.** We now know that dental caries ("cavities" or tooth decay) are an infectious disease transmitted from other people. Babies usually pick up the germs that cause cavities from family members, especially mothers. Not sharing eating utensils and drinks with your baby will help reduce caries.
 - **Brush your child's teeth twice daily** with small amount (smear) of fluoride-free toothpaste.

- **Eliminate all bottle use.** It is time for the “cold turkey” approach if your child is still using a bottle. Bottle use at this age, especially during the night, causes dental caries. Breast-feeding during the night also causes caries.
 - **Make healthy food choices** throughout the day. Frequent sweets, including fruit juices, increase tooth decay.
 - For more information about dental care look at the pediatric dentistry website, www.aapd.org.
- **Toilet Training.** Most children are ready to toilet train between 2 and 3 years of age. On occasion children less than 2 years are ready to toilet train; however, many children are not ready until age 3. The normal age range for toilet training is quite large.
 - **Signs of being ready to toilet train:**
 1. He is dry for two hours; dry after naps.
 2. Tells you if he is wet and when he needs to have a bowel movement.
 3. Shows an interest in toilet training.
 4. Able to pull pants and pullup or underwear on and off.
 - **Preparing your child for toilet training:**
 1. Read books about using the toilet to your child.
 2. Have a parent or sibling of the same sex take your child to the bathroom.
 3. Take your child with you to buy a floorlevel potty chair. Make it clear that this is his special chair. At first let your child keep the chair in his play area and let him sit on it fully clothed. Help your child develop good feelings about his potty chair.
- **Sleep**
 - **Most children this age need between 11–12 ¼ hours of sleep per day.** 9 ½ hours is the average nighttime sleep duration. Most children this age also take a single afternoon nap of close to 2 hours.
 - **Having regular times for bedtime and naptime is very important to your child and your family.** Predictable schedules are comforting to children and help them develop normal day-night patterns. Your child should not wake at night for food, drink or comfort on a regular basis.
 - If your child is having problems sleeping through the night, we suggest “Solve Your Child’s Sleep Problems” by Richard Ferber.
- **Discipline**
 - **Testing limits is normal toddler development.** It is not unusual for parents to deal with challenging behavior by their toddler every 5–10 minutes. Toddlers try different behaviors and see what reaction they get.
 - How you react makes a big difference in how your child learns to behave. Set limits that are important to you and ask others to enforce the same limits with your toddler.
 - **Be clear about the rules.** A toddler’s memory is still developing so they need many reminders.
 - **Be specific.** For example, say “please put your blocks in the box” instead of “clean up your toys”. Use simple words and a nice tone when you tell your child what to do. Staying calm will teach your child self-control.
 - **Be consistent.** Use the same consequences for misbehavior. For example, every time your child throws a toy off the high chair take the toy away for a few minutes. Keep time-outs brief, no more than a minute or two.
 - **Change your child’s focus** to another toy or activity if she is getting too upset.
 - **Praise your child when she is behaving well.** Play with your child each day by doing activities she likes. Don’t expect your child to share at this age.
 - **Spanking is not the best choice. The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend spanking.** Although many Americans were spanked as children, there are several important reasons not to spank:
 - Even though spanking may seem to “work” at first, it loses its impact after a while.
 - Because most parents do not want to spank, they are less likely to be consistent.
 - Spanking increases aggression and anger instead of teaching responsibility.
 - Parents may tend to stay calm but often do not, and then regret their actions later.
 - Spanking can lead to physical struggles and even grow to the point of harming your child.
 - **Time Out** is appropriate and works if you are consistent. Time out length is one minute for every year of age. Choose a quiet and boring place for your child such as a crib or a highchair buckled into place.

Development

- **Social/Emotional.**
 - Communication and social skills are developing rapidly in most 18 month olds. Despite this rapid development, most 18 month olds still have limited communication skills and tend to get frustrated easily. **Successful parenting of an 18 month old requires patience, consistent limits, and often gentle transitions from one activity to another.** The defiance and

negativism of children this age reflect a desire for choice and independence. Having learned the concept of choice, children become more assertive and demonstrative. A toddler's constant response **"No!" often reflects a desire to choose rather than "no, I don't want."** At the same time, children need to have strong emotional ties and feel loved by parents. To venture out into the world and test independence, a child must know that he has a safe and emotionally secure place at home.

- To help with emotional and social development, **allow your child to make simple choices**, such as which fruit for snack-time or what book at nap time. **Praise** your child when he is being cooperative and friendly. **Comfort** your child when he has fears or is afraid. Reassure him that you are there. **Make him feel safe.**
- While your child may engage you in play, children don't generally involve other children in their imaginary play until around 2 ½ years. However, children this age often enjoy having another child around during play. **They watch each other and learn from each other by imitation.** For example one child may feed a doll and the other toddler will pick up a stuffed animal and feed it as well. This is referred to as **parallel play**. True social interaction and shared imaginary play usually doesn't happen for another year.
- **Around 18 months, children begin developing a sense of self awareness.** They are learning that they are individuals with their own feelings, thoughts, likes and dislikes. Next they realize that other people have their own feelings, thoughts and preferences as well. This helps children learn empathy. They start to imagine how another person feels. To **help your child develop empathy: Talk about other's feelings.** "Susie is sad because you took her doll. Let's give Susie her doll back and we can find you another one." **Demonstrate empathy:** "Oh no, Johnny hurt his knee. Let's bring him some ice." "Are you scared of the big dog? He's nice, but I'll hold you until he walks by."
- **Cognitive/ Learning.**
 - Children this age enjoy imaginary play and will eventually involve other people in their pretend play. **Provide toys that encourage imaginary play** such as simple dolls, toy phone, cars, trucks, trains, musical instruments, play kitchens, and dress-up clothes like old hats and costumes. **Join in the fun** if your child wants you to play. You can play puppy, wear a silly hat, or let your child serve you "food". Enjoy such moments.
 - This is also an age when **children become problem-solvers.** You will see your child filling and dumping, opening and closing, shaking and throwing, as they **explore and try to make sense of their world.** At this age a toy shovel and pail, a sandbox, push/pull toys, and hammering toys help satisfy the need to solve problems. Three and four piece puzzles and building blocks also help develop problem solving skills.
 - **Children this age start to recognize patterns.** You may start noticing your child sorting objects— trains in one place, cars in another. Help you child practice sorting. Tasks like helping to sort laundry are fun to most toddlers. Socks in one pile, shirts in another. Shape-sorters are also fun for children at this age.
- **Language/Speech**
 - Communication skills should be rapidly improving at this age. **Nonverbal communication is starting to be supported by language.** Your child should be pointing and starting to use words to indicate needs and show you items of interest. A squeal of laughter and pointing at a puppy is a happy example of nonverbal communication. Respond to nonverbal communication with the appropriate word or phrase, "Look at the doggie!". Soon your toddler will add "dog" or "doggie" as he points at the puppy.
 - Most 18 month old children say 10–25 words. Soon after 18 months language abilities explode. By 2 years most children can say at least 50 words. **Reading at least 30 minutes a day to your child will help speech and language development.** Talk to you child, and ask questions about the pictures and stories as you read.
 - Talk to your child all day long. You are his first and best teacher. **Notice nonverbal communication and help your child verbalize these actions.** For example, when your toddler takes your hand and leads you to a toy, verbalize his nonverbal message. "You want me to play with you? Here I come!"
 - **Children benefit from learning two languages at the same time.** This is a wonderful opportunity for your child and is a way to bond with their community and culture. Don't worry when you hear some language mixing. Eventually they will sort out the words.
- **Gross Motor (Movement) Skills**
 - **Your child's ability to move about and effectively use his arms and legs is rapidly improving.** Most 18 month olds run well, can throw objects while standing up, and seat them self in a small chair. Over the next few months your toddler will start carrying large objects, squatting while playing and going up stairs placing both feet on each step. Push and pull toys, stable ride on toys, and large balls are good toys for this age group.
 - **Children need constant supervision at this age.** Rapidly improving motor skills along with very little judgment is a combination that results in lots of accidents. Parents and other caretakers have to be vigilant..

- **Fine Motor (Hand and Finger) Skills**
 - Your child's ability to use his hands and fingers are rapidly improving. He should be able to use a spoon and cup without spilling all of the time, stack 2 or 3 blocks, and may even imitate scribbling with a crayon.
 - Blocks, shape sorters, hammering toys, small balls, and crayons (with close supervision!) are all toys that help toddlers improve fine motor skills. Injuries are the leading cause of death in children younger than 4 years. Most of these injuries can be prevented.

Safety

- **Firearm Hazards**
 - Children in homes where guns are present are in more danger of being shot by themselves, their friends, or family members than being injured by an intruder. Handguns are especially dangerous.
 - If you choose to keep a gun, keep it unloaded and in a locked place, with ammunition stored and locked separately.
- **Poisonings**
 - Children continue to explore their world by putting everything in their mouths. Keep safety caps on all medicines. Keep all household products and medicines completely out of sight and reach. Never store lye drain cleaners in your home. Keep all products in their original containers.
 - Save the Poison Help phone number (1-800-222- 1222) to your phone. Call Poison help immediately if your child puts something dangerous in her mouth. Do not make your child vomit.
- **Falls**
 - To prevent serious falls, lock the doors to any dangerous areas. Use gates on stairways and install window guards on windows above the first floor. Remove sharp-edged furniture from the room your child plays and sleeps in.
 - At this age children walk well, run, and climb. Unfortunately they do not understand what is dangerous and **need constant supervision.**
- **Burns**
 - **The kitchen is a dangerous place for your child during meal preparation time.** It is best to keep your child out of the kitchen while cooking.
 - Safe places for your child while you are cooking include the playpen, crib, stationary activity center, or buckled into a high chair. Never carry your child and hot liquids or food at the same time.
 - To protect your child from tap water burns, **set your water heater to no more than 120 degrees.**
 - If your child does get burned, immediately put cold water on the burn and keep the burned area in cold water (not iced cold) for a few minutes to cool it off. Then cover the burn with a dry bandage or clean cloth.
 - **Make sure that you have a working smoke alarm on every level of your home.** Test the alarms monthly. It is best to use smoke alarms that use long-life batteries, but if you do not, change the batteries at least once a year.
- **Drowning**
 - **Never leave your child alone in or near a bath tub, pail of water, pool or any other water** -even for a moment. Stay within arm's length of your child when you are around water.
 - If you have a swimming pool, fence it on all sides with a fence at least 4 feet high, and be sure the gates are self-latching. Most children drown when they wander out of the house and fall into a pool that is not fenced off from the house.
- **Choking**
 - **Choking is a leading cause of death in children under 3 years of age.** Food, coins and toys are the main causes of choking-related deaths. Children at this age need to be supervised at all times. They will find every small object left within reach, and more often than not, place it in their mouth.
 - **Hot dogs are the food most commonly associated with fatal choking in children.** Other high risk foods include hard candy, grapes, raw carrots, apples, peanuts/nuts, popcorn, chunks of peanut butter, marshmallows and meat stick/sausages. Some of these foods, like hard candy and marshmallows, are not appropriate for young children. If you give your child foods like grapes, apples and meat sticks make sure they are cut into very small bites. Also have your child sit down while eating, running about while eating is asking for trouble.
 - **Un-inflated and pieces of broken latex balloons are the most common non-food cause of choking deaths in children.** Coins, small toys and small toy parts are also major causes of choking in children. Avoid balloons and don't let your child play with small toys or toys that have parts the size or smaller than your child's airway.
- **Car Safety.**
 - Car crashes are a great danger to your child's life and health. To prevent injuries use a car safety seat every time your child rides in a car.

- **All infants and toddlers should ride in a rear-facing car safety seat until they are 2 years of age.** Be sure that the safety seat is installed correctly.
- The safest place for all infants and children to ride is the back seat.
- Do not leave your child alone in or around the car. Keep vehicles and their trunks locked.
- **Always walk behind your car to be sure your child is not there before you back out of your driveway.** Children are not always visible in the rearview mirror.

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) Programs

The State of Texas has a network of local community programs (Early Childhood Intervention or ECI) that provide services to Texas families and their children, birth to age three, with developmental delays. The cost of services provided is based on family income. Children are eligible for ECI services if they are under age 3 and have developmental delays or conditions (such as Down's, prematurity, vision or hearing impairments) that have a high possibility of resulting in a developmental delay. Anyone may refer a child for ECI services. If you believe that your child is delayed or has a condition that could lead to delays, call 1-800-682-5115 or visit the ECI website at www.dars.state.tx.us/ecis for the ECI program closest to you.

Reading Suggestions and Resources

We encourage all parents to invest in one or more reference book on child care and child development. The following are a few books and websites that we can recommend:

- **Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5**, The American Academy of Pediatrics.
- **Your Baby and Child: From Birth to Age 5**, Penelope Leach.
- **Toddler 411**, Ari Brown, Denise Fields.
- **www.healthychildren.org**, A parenting website sponsored by the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- **www.seatcheck.org**, You can find a child safety seat technician closest to you with this website.
- **www.cdc.gov/nip**, National Immunization Program. Federal government sponsored online information about vaccines.