

15–33 months



Feeding Your Toddler, 15–33 months

Having regular meals and snacks is important to your growing toddler. A hungry toddler may cry, have tantrums, or become clingy when they get hungry. Offer a snack in between meals and one before bedtime to keep your toddler from getting overly hungry. Your toddler can sit at the table now. Eating together is a perfect way to get close and connect as a family. Talk, tell stories, and enjoy each other's company during mealtimes. Your independent toddler will want to have more and more control over their daily activities. The more choices and control you give your toddler, the more positive and relaxed mealtimes become.

Keep in Mind

- Your responsibility is to offer healthy foods. Your toddler's responsibility is to decide what and how much they eat. Offer foods you know your child likes and some new foods.
- Your toddler needs five or six small meals or snacks each day. They may eat a lot at one meal and skip the next. This is fine. Your child will eat when they are hungry.
- Never force your child to eat. Toddlers are typically nervous about new foods. Offer tastes of new foods many times. In time, your child will accept most foods if they aren't forced.
- Your independent toddler can now sit at the table in a high chair or booster seat. A drop cloth may help keep things less messy as your child practices feeding themselves.
- It will be hard for your toddler to sit for an entire meal. Decide how long is reasonable. A good goal is 10 minutes or so. This time gets longer as your child gets older.

Suggestions

- Create a consistent daily routine that includes times for meals and snacks. This will decrease the possibility that your child will get overly hungry during the day.
- Create a routine around meals and snacks: First wash hands, then sit and eat, then clean up. This helps your toddler know when meals and snacks begin and end.
- Turn off electronics and mute phones. Help everyone focus on eating and interacting with each other during mealtimes. Rules such as "no toys or phones at the table" also help.
- Make time to sit and talk with your toddler. You may not be able to sit with your child at every meal, but they will love having your company while eating.

(continued)

15–33 months



Feeding Your Toddler, 15–33 months (continued)

SUGGESTIONS (continued)

- Provide choices. Simple choices give your child a little bit of control and may decrease upsets. “Do you want warm peas or frozen?” “Do you want carrot sticks or circles?”
- Teach your child to use (or sign) words. The words *more*, *all done*, *please*, and *thank you* will help your child request (and reject) foods politely!
- Let your independent child start to feed themselves. Your child can eat finger foods and learn to use a spoon, fork, and cup. Now they can control how fast or slowly they eat.
- Catch your toddler doing the right thing. Let your child know you are proud of them when they eat like a big kid, wait patiently, or use words (or signs) to ask for food.

Questions? Concerns? Talk to your child’s health care provider.