

HOW TO TEACH YOUR TODDLER HEALTHY FOOD HABITS

Worried that your toddler might not be getting the nutrition she needs? Cultivating healthy eating habits is a primary and essential step to raising healthy, happy children.

From the time you cradled a delicate, under-12-month-old baby, [development](#) has been first and foremost on your mind – and still it continues to be, even as you watch your little one now grow to become a curious, clever toddler exploring all the tastes and textures available to her.

For many parents and primary caregivers, the task of making sure their child eats well is an act of love. When you feed your baby good food, you're introducing her senses to an adventure of tastes and textures. When you serve nutrient-rich meals, you're providing the fuel she needs to develop – physically, mentally and even emotionally. When you give your child a balanced diet, you're helping her to grow strong, smart and happy.

A balanced diet consists of the following toddler health-boosting food groups:

- **Carbohydrates:** Rice, pasta, cereals, potatoes
- **Fruit and vegetables**
- **Protein foods:** Meat, tofu, egg yolk, lentils, beans
- **Calcium sources:** Breast milk, fortified milk, cheese, yoghurt

Toddler Feeding Challenges

The pleasures and benefits of eating well, however, can sometimes be lost on little diners, especially during the toddler years.

Some of the unique challenges of toddler feeding include the following:

- Children undergo **rapid development** during this stage, which can affect their appetite.
- Your child may be experiencing food issues such as **allergies and sensitivities**.
- There might be **behavioral concerns** or funny food preferences that are impacting your child's relationship with food.
- The typical day of a toddler is busy, high-energy and highly active, which can make them **hungry at erratic hours**.
- The combination of all these, plus the **anxiety you may feel as a parent**, can make the dinner table seem more like a warzone than a wonderful place of nourishment.

Start Early with Good Eating Habits

Here's some good news: Your child is never too young to learn about the pleasures and benefits of eating well.

By starting early in teaching your toddler healthy food habits, you're making sure she meets daily nutritional requirements with **minimum fuss and stress**. Plus, you're building good eating habits that will serve her for life.

As with any lesson you'd like to teach your children, "**show, don't tell**" is an effective method for promoting good nutrition. Consider the following parent-tested and parent-approved tips to start equipping your toddler with healthy eating habits today.

- **Make healthy the default.**

When your toddler needs a snack, make sure the easy, accessible and preferably only option is a healthy one, such as an apple or a cheese puff. When getting lunch or dinner ready, **make vegetables the star of the show**

rather than the side dish. Offer these options in a matter-of-fact manner. It's a way to put the message across that eating healthy is not a special event but a daily choice.

- **Pretty is the new healthy.**

For toddlers who are exploring and getting to know the world around them, **presentation is (almost) everything**. While you don't have to make each meal picture-perfect, studies show that you'll get better results if the food you are offering looks appealing. Fortunately, the gorgeous colors of fruits and veggies make this an easy task for you. Those hues also signify nutritional goodness, so it's a win-win for all.

- **Bank on positivity.**

The biggest mistake many parents make is to insist that their children eat nutritious foods, rather than **inspire them** to do so. Orders such as "clean your plate" or disciplinary tactics such as offering sweet treats as a reward and leafy greens as punishment can lead to negative associations with food. While you want to be consistent and persistent in your efforts, understand that your toddler needs support and understanding, especially in trying new things to eat.

- **Recruit them in the enterprise.**

Another parent-ninja move to make toddlers not just accept healthy eating, but also look forward to it is to get them involved. **Give them little chores** when cooking or preparing meals. Take them to the local farmers' market or to the grocery store and give them a bit of an opportunity to make decisions (between two healthy options, of course). Plan an outing that includes a trip to a community garden or a local farm. It's a clever way to get kids excited about food. Moreover, these activities are opportunities for teaching and learning, and can be fun, too.

- **Bon Appetit!**

Most importantly, practice what you preach. What you eat, how you choose food, even how you react to it all makes an impact on your little ones. It also pays to **focus not just on the food but also the entire experience** – the conversations around the table, or the very ritual of sharing meals with loved ones. Good food, after all, is not just nourishment for the body but also for the mind and spirit.