

## **FEEDING YOUR 1- TO 2-YEAR-OLD**

At this age toddlers are transitioning from the foods and eating habits they had as infants toward a diet more like your own. Your job is to keep broadening your child's palate by introducing new flavors and textures. Food preferences are established early in life so help your child develop a taste for healthy foods now.

Toddlers have little tummies, so serve foods that are packed with the nutrients they need to grow healthy and strong, and limit the sweets and empty calories.

Your toddler will continue to explore self-feeding, first with fingers and then with utensils at around 15 to 18 months of age. Give your child many opportunities to practice these skills, but lend a hand when frustrations arise. As skills develop, step back and let your child take over.

Toddlers also will start to assert their independence, and the table is one place where you should give yours some sense of control. Allow your child to respond to internal cues for hunger and fullness but set the boundaries. Remember: You decide what variety of healthy foods to offer at a meal and your child decides which of those foods to eat, how much to eat, and whether to eat at all.

### **A Word About Milk**

Milk is an important part of a toddler's diet because it provides calcium and vitamin D, which help build strong bones. Kids under age 2 should drink whole milk for the dietary fats needed for normal growth and brain development. When your child is 2, you can probably make the switch to low-fat or nonfat milk, but it's a good idea to talk with your child's doctor before doing so.

Between 12 and 18 months of age is a good time for transition to a cup. Instead of cutting out bottles all at once, you can gradually eliminate them from the feeding schedule, starting with mealtime. Offer whole milk in a cup after the child has begun the meal. If you are breastfeeding, only offer milk in a cup and avoid the bottle habit altogether.

Some kids don't like cows milk at first because it's different from the breast milk or formula they're used to. If that's the case, it's OK to mix whole milk with formula or breast milk and gradually adjust the mixture so that it eventually becomes 100% cow's milk.

## **Iron Intake**

It's important to watch out for iron deficiency after your child reaches 1 year of age. It can affect a child's physical, mental, and behavioral development, and can also lead to anemia.

To help prevent iron deficiency:

- limit your child's milk intake to 16 to 24 full ounces (480-720 milliliters) a day
- increase iron-rich foods in your child's diet like iron-fortified snacks, meat, poultry, fish, beans, and tofu
- continue serving iron-fortified cereal until your child is 18 to 24 months old

Talk with your child's doctor if you're concerned that your child drinks a lot of cow's milk or isn't getting enough iron, or if you're thinking of giving your child any vitamin supplement.

## **Foods to Avoid**

Although you can now start to offer some of the foods you've been withholding (milk, citrus fruits, whole eggs), watch for allergic reactions when offering any new food. Be sure to tell your child's doctor if a close family member has a food allergy, and you may want to delay introducing that food and those commonly associated with food allergies, such as peanuts and seafood. You may need to wait until your child is 2 or 3 years old to offer some foods, or the doctor may recommend allergy testing.

Avoid foods that could present choking hazards, like popcorn, hard candies, hot dogs, raw vegetables and hard fruits, whole grapes, raisins, and nuts. Supervise your child at all times when eating.

## **How Much Should My Child Eat?**

Offer your child three meals and two or three snacks a day, but keep in mind that it's not uncommon for toddlers to skip meals. Allowing a child to skip a meal is a difficult concept for many parents, but kids should be allowed to respond to their own internal cues for hunger and fullness. It's important not to push food on a child who's not hungry. On the other hand, a child shouldn't be allowed to eat on demand all day long.

Maintain a regular schedule of meals and snacks so that your child will come to expect that food will be available during certain times of the day. If you have any questions about how much your child should eat, speak with your child's doctor.

©1995-2007 KidsHealth. All rights reserved.

The information provided in this handout is a free service to the patients of Family Medicine Associates. Please consult with your Primary Care Physician for further explanation and questions.