

Feeding your Toddler

Supporting an adventurous eater





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Creating a relaxed food environment

It's never too early to help your child learn to enjoy eating by creating a supportive environment. As a parent, you play an important role in:

- ▶ Developing your family's food skills
- ▶ Supporting your child's interest in food
- ▶ Shaping your child's eating habits

How you choose and prepare your food will shape your family's attitudes and eating behaviours. You can help your children develop positive eating habits.

The division of responsibility in feeding

Who's the boss?

Adults and toddlers both have jobs to do. Let everyone involved in the care of your child know about the adult's job and the child's job, and encourage them to follow this approach when feeding your child. Structure is key to ensure the division of responsibility. This means having sit-down meals and snacks at set times so that a child is able to trust they will be fed.

Your job is to decide:

- ▶ What foods to serve
- ▶ When to serve them
- ▶ Where to serve them
- ▶ How to offer them

Your toddler's job is to decide:

- ▶ How much to eat
- ▶ What to eat from the foods you offer



Adult's job

What?

You decide which foods to serve. Offer basically the same food you prepare for the rest of the family because toddlers do not need special foods. Preparing a different meal from the family meal does not encourage toddlers to try new foods or learn to enjoy what the family is eating.

When?

Toddlers like a regular routine. Your child needs you to offer meals and snacks at about the same times every day. This will usually be three meals and 2 to 3 snacks each day. If your child doesn't eat a lot at one meal or snack, they will soon have another opportunity to eat.

Where?

Include your child at the family table where they can see you eating and learn about foods and how to feed themselves.

How?

Give your child the time to explore foods in a calm pleasant setting, without any pressure to eat a particular food or to eat a certain amount. Offer familiar foods along with new foods. They might eat only one or two of the foods you have offered.

Child's job

What?

They decide if they are going to eat and how much. The amount of food your child eats may change from day to day and meal to meal depending on a number of factors. With regular meals and snacks there are many chances to eat.

Keep in mind that even at a very young age children know when they are hungry and when they are full. Trust them to do their job!

**For more information
about the Division of
Responsibility approach
visit ellynsatterinstitute.org**

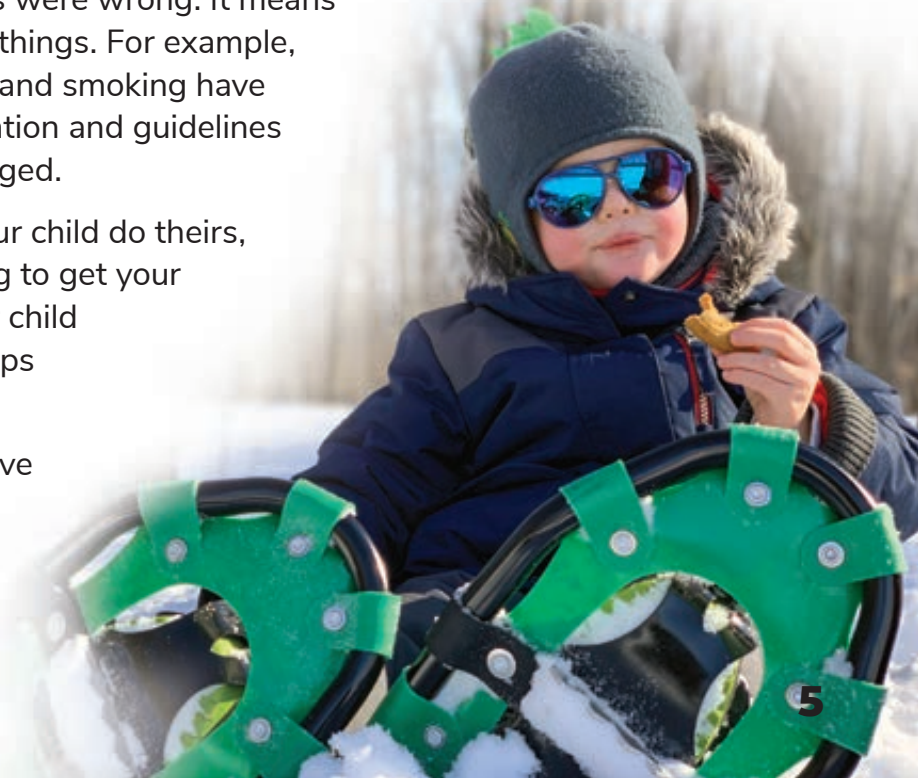


Let yourself off the hook!

As a parent, you want what's best for your toddler. Even with the best intentions, we sometimes put pressure on our children to eat. Many of us were raised to “finish our plates”. It doesn't mean our parents or our grandparents were wrong. It means new information changes how we do things. For example, information and laws about seatbelts and smoking have changed drastically over time. Information and guidelines about feeding children have also changed.

When you stick to your job and let your child do theirs, you give yourself the OK to stop trying to get your child to eat. This is part of letting your child develop healthy eating habits, and helps you enjoy mealtimes as a family.

Remember that some issues will resolve themselves in a pressure-free environment.



Healthy habits start early.

Remember the goal is for your toddler to develop a healthy relationship with food early in life.

What is pressure?

Pressure is trying to make a child put something in their mouth that they don't want. It does not help them learn to enjoy eating, and may make them avoid some foods. Pressure can come in many forms, and can often be hard to identify. The following list describes different forms of pressure. Even things that seem encouraging or playful can be forms of pressure.

Forcing

"You're going to stay in your chair until you eat three pieces of carrot"; or trying to feed a child after they have finished eating.

Punishing

"If you don't eat your meat you can't have any watermelon for dessert."

Lecturing

"Eat your orange, it's good for you."

Coaxing

"Just taste it, you don't have to swallow it."
"Just eat one bite."
"Eat a bit to make Mommy happy."

Bribing and rewarding

"If you eat another bite of chicken, then you can have an extra story at bedtime."

Food games

Such as bringing the spoonful of food towards the child's mouth saying "here comes the choo-choo train into the station."



Praise

When you offer praise for eating healthy foods or for eating everything on their plate this may send a confusing message, especially since children may eat a food one day and not the next. Although you may be trying to encourage the behaviour, praise at the table can make it harder for children to pay attention to what their body wants and can actually increase picky eating.

Meal times can be an important time to connect and talk about your day. Healthy dinnertime talk is important for nurturing a healthy relationship with food long-term. Try to encourage your child's adventurous eating rather than praising it. Read below for options on what you can say instead.

Instead of:

“Great eating tonight. You finished everything on your plate!”

Try:

“I noticed that you ate your peas tonight.”

“Good boy for eating your broccoli!”

“I see that you're enjoying your broccoli.”

“Great job eating all your dinner.”

“I've noticed that you're not always asking for snacks right after dinnertime anymore – you must be filling your tummy at dinnertime.”

“Good girl for eating some red pepper.”

“That was brave of you for trying some red pepper – you must be proud of yourself.”

What's a parent to do?

Questions and answers about toddler eating.

What parents sometimes see as “challenges” at mealtimes are usually normal child behaviours that are part of learning about food and eating.

My daughter is always asking for food, even when it's not a regular meal or snack time. Should I give it to her anyway?

You should avoid giving snacks when it's not a scheduled snack time. Extra snacks can lead to tooth decay and interfere with the development of healthy eating habits. Offer water if your child is thirsty. If she is still breastfeeding, let her nurse when she wants. This helps her maintain breastfeeding after 12 months of age.

My son often can't seem to calm down enough to eat. What should I do?!

This may be normal behaviour for some children. There are things you can do to help. Try making sure there isn't too much time between meals and snacks so he doesn't get extremely hungry and upset. Plan some quiet play time before meals and snacks, such as playing with blocks or reading a story, and avoid distractions at the table like phones or other devices, TV, music or toys.

My daughter is 22 months old and lately she turns down many foods I offer. It feels like she says “no” to just about everything. What should I do?

Remember, your job is to offer the food and your child's job is to decide if she will eat it, and how much. It's okay for her to say “no” to foods. Don't try to make her eat them, and don't make something else. It's best not to argue over food, so mealtimes are pleasant.

My son often does not want to try new foods. What can I do?

Don't worry, be patient and keep trying. Let him decide if he wants to eat them or not. He may need to be offered a food 30 times or more before he learns to enjoy it. He may look at, touch, taste and spit out food. Include new foods with familiar ones that your child has eaten before so that he is able to eat enough from what is served. When toddlers see the rest of the family enjoying a food, they're more likely to try it.



Tip

Match new foods with familiar foods or less-favourite foods with favourite foods.

My 1 year old will eat a lot one day and only a little the next. I'm afraid he's not getting enough to eat. Should I be worried?

No need to worry. Offer your child 3 meals and 2 to 3 snacks a day. If he doesn't want to eat one of them, he has another opportunity to eat within a few hours. It's okay to trust his appetite and this may change depending on his growth rate. Give him time to eat at his own pace. When he shows he is no longer interested in eating you can remove his plate.

The different amount a child eats from day-to-day tends to average out so they get the calories and nutrients they need. This is especially true if the child is offered healthy foods at regular meals and snacks, and is allowed to eat the amount they want and stop when they are satisfied.

When my daughter doesn't want what I've offered to eat, she whines, cries and acts out. What should I do?!

Be firm about not giving her something different. That will only reinforce that whining works. Over time, she may continue to whine and demand different foods, instead of learning to try the foods that you offer. Be patient and calmly tell her "We are having these foods for dinner today", then let her decide what and how much to eat from the foods already on the table.

Encourage her to say 'No thank you' if she doesn't want what is offered. She needs the freedom to turn down food she doesn't want, and the reassurance she doesn't have to eat food just because it is on her plate. Even if she put it there herself.

My 19-month old plays with his food, sometimes making a mess or throwing it on the floor. Is this normal?

Yes, it's a perfectly normal way for a child to learn about new foods – how they look, feel, smell and taste. What appears to be "playing" may be part of your child learning to self-feed. So be patient and avoid pressure to eat. It's okay to be messy! Know your child is learning and developing.

If they are still breastfeeding, let them nurse when they want.



Managing a picky eater

Modelling healthy habits and removing pressure to eat certain foods can be a powerful tool when trying to prevent picky eating. Some children hesitate to try new foods. Children are more likely to accept a new food if they are exposed to it often.



- ▶ Give your toddler lots of opportunities to smell, touch and taste new and different foods.
- ▶ Offer foods with a variety of textures from an early age. Children need to learn how to move foods of different shapes, sizes and textures around in their mouths. This exercises their mouth muscles and gets them used to new foods.
- ▶ Let your toddler eat at their own pace.
- ▶ When offering a new food, offer it along with something they already like.
- ▶ Involve your toddler in planning and preparing meals and snacks to increase interest in trying new foods.
- ▶ Give your child a choice of different foods to try. Let your child decide which one to try today.
- ▶ Try serving vegetables in different ways – cooked, grated, in salads or raw with dips (see section on choking on pages 16 and 17). Some popular books recommend “hiding” vegetables in recipes. Although trying new ways to include vegetables is encouraged, such as grating into salads or pureeing in soups, it shouldn’t be about tricking your child.

As your child gets older, they may start refusing foods they used to like or they may start showing signs of picky eating. Favouring just a couple of foods or not wanting foods to touch each other on the plate are normal behaviours. These behaviours often go away by the time your child is about 5 years old.

Eat together

A big part of helping your child develop healthy eating habits is having pleasant mealtimes.

Be a role model

Eat meals together as a family, so you can be a role model. Children tend to copy what adults do. Serve food at the table. Remove distractions to help your child focus on eating. Turn off the TV, put away phones and other devices and keep toys off the table.

Enjoy mealtimes

Enjoy your time together. Simply by being at the family meal table, your child can learn about foods and table manners, and enjoy conversation and social time with the family. Over time, children in families that eat together, tend to eat better.

No special foods required

Offer your toddler the same nutritious foods you serve the rest of the family (with the exception of choking hazards – see information on pages 16 and 17). Your child doesn't need "toddler" foods at home or a "Kids' Menu" when eating out.

Learning takes time

Don't worry if your toddler sometimes turns down what you've given them. That's normal for a toddler. It takes time to learn to enjoy a wide variety of foods. Just keep serving those foods over time, so your toddler can get used to them.

Toddlers may need to see a new food up to 30 times before it is accepted. Give your toddler many opportunities to look at, touch, smell, and taste new foods. This will help your child be more accepting of new tastes and textures.





Healthy eating habits

How do you know your toddler is learning healthy eating habits?

1. They are trying some new foods.
2. They are eating at the table with the family.
3. They are eating what the rest of the family is eating.
4. They are included in the conversation at the meal, but they are not the centre of attention. (For example, don't comment on what they are or aren't eating, and don't fuss over them.)
5. They stop eating when they have had enough to eat.
6. They show that they want more when they're hungry.

Serving food **'family style'** – putting the food in the middle of the table – and letting each person choose what to put on their own plate, gives children the control to decide what to eat from what you have offered.



Managing “junk” food – finding a happy middle ground

“Junk” or “forbidden” foods are considered higher sugar, higher fat, lower nutrient foods. The goal is to allow your child to feel relaxed about all kinds of foods.

There is research to show that children whose intake of these foods is restricted (i.e. no access to these foods) may eat more of them when they get the chance. In addition, if these foods are used as “rewards” (i.e. dessert after you finish dinner or when they do something that is asked) this could lead to these foods becoming more desirable than other foods.

Structure is key!

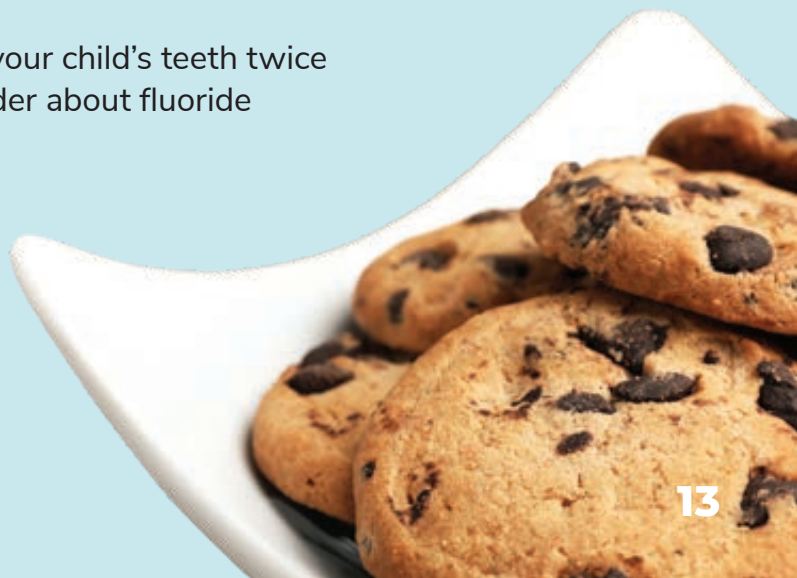
When offering these foods ensure they fit into meal or snack time. It’s about planning reliable, enjoyable meals and snacks!

How to strike a balance:

- ▶ Include higher fat foods at some meals and snacks to make them seem less “forbidden”.
- ▶ Make dessert part of the meal by putting out a single serving and letting each person eat it at any part of the meal.
- ▶ Every so often structure a snack where your child is able to have control over how much sweets to eat. This may be at a birthday party or even just putting out a plate of cookies to eat.
- ▶ Keep a regular dental routine by brushing your child’s teeth twice a day. Talk to your dental health care provider about fluoride tooth paste and flossing.



Find out more about the division of responsibility at: www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/how-to-feed/the-division-of-responsibility-in-feeding and how to introduce sweets wisely at: www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/family-meals-focus/92-managing-junk-food-aka-sweets-chips-sodas.





In addition to milk, you can also offer small amounts of milk alternatives such as yogurt, low-sodium cottage cheese, and hard cheeses. Choose hard cheeses over processed, since processed cheeses and spreads have more sodium (salt).



Drinks for toddlers

Milk

- ▶ Breast milk is the best choice for your child until they are at least 2 years old. Your toddler does not need any milk other than breast milk if they are still breastfed.
- ▶ When an infant is on formula and consuming regular sources of iron-rich foods, then pasteurized milk may replace formula. If a toddler is consuming soy-based formula and they cannot be given cow's milk then they should continue soy-based commercial formula until 2 years of age.
- ▶ If you are transitioning to cow's milk as your main milk source and your toddler is eating a variety of iron rich foods, you can offer pasturized whole (3.25% M.F.) cow's milk in an open cup.
- ▶ Offer pasteurized whole (3.25% M.F.) cow's milk during meals (up to 3 cups per day) and offer water between meals.
- ▶ Too much milk may interfere with eating other foods (because milk is filling) and how the body absorbs iron rich foods.
- ▶ All toddlers who are breastfed or fed some breast milk should be given a liquid vitamin D supplement of 400 IU (10 mcg) every day.
- ▶ Vegetarian beverages (such as rice and almond milk) do not have enough fat or other nutrients to meet a toddler's needs, even if they are fortified, and should not be given before 2 years of age.
- ▶ If fortified soy beverage is being offered occasionally in addition to breast milk or cow's milk as the main milk source, it should be an unflavoured, full-fat, fortified soy beverage.

Juice

- ▶ Offer vegetables and fruit more often than juice to help make sure your child gets enough fibre.
- ▶ Children have small stomachs and fill-up quickly on beverages.
- ▶ Offer water frequently. Juice should be offered much less frequently if at all.
- ▶ For dental health, if you are going to offer juice offer it at a meal time instead of on its own.
- ▶ Vegetable and tomato juices can be high in sodium (salt), look for lower sodium versions.

Water

- ▶ When your baby begins to eat other foods, you can start to offer water occasionally in an open cup.
- ▶ Offer water between meals and snacks if they are thirsty.

Drinking from an open cup

- ▶ At 6 months of age, a baby can learn to drink from a small, open cup while sitting down. Sippy cups are not recommended.
- ▶ Be patient. It takes time to learn to drink from a cup. Start with a small cup and a small amount of water.
- ▶ Sleeping with a bottle at night or during nap time may cause tooth decay because all milk – including formula – contains sugar.
- ▶ It is recommended that by 12-18 months of age your toddler has moved away from drinking from a bottle.

Why are sippy cups not recommended?

Using sippy cups or bottles for water or other fluids requires “sucking”, which doesn’t support mature drinking skills and can interfere with oral-motor and speech development.

Choking hazards

Children up to the age of 4 years are more at risk of choking on food because they do not chew as well as older children and adults. Some foods have a shape and size that can block the airway of a young child.

Choking can occur in children when they:

- ▶ Eat pieces of food that are too large.
- ▶ Eat too fast.
- ▶ Chew improperly.
- ▶ Cry, laugh, run or jump around with food in their mouth.

Your child should always eat sitting upright, and you should stay with your child while they are eating because a child who is choking may not be able to make noise or attract attention. Coughing is a sign that a child is removing the object naturally.

While all foods can potentially cause choking, certain foods can be especially hazardous for children under age 4 (refer to the next page).

Learn what to do if a child is choking, and have all emergency numbers saved in a convenient location.



Foods that may cause problems

What to do to make them safe

Foods that are stringy or chewy like meat, long pasta, or cheesy toppings

- ▶ Cut the food up into small pieces

Food that sticks to the roof of the mouth like cream cheese, cheese spread and nut butters

- ▶ Spread it thinly for your toddler

Round or smooth foods like grapes or cherries

- ▶ Cut them into 4 parts and take out the pits or seeds

Foods like wieners or hot dogs

- ▶ Cut them lengthwise and then cut again into bite-sized pieces

Hard foods like raw vegetables or fruit

- ▶ Cook to soften them or grate them into tiny pieces

Hard candies, nuts, seeds, popcorn, fish with bones, or snacks with toothpicks or skewers, raisins and gum

- ▶ Do not give these foods to toddlers before they are 4 years old

Soften hard raw carrots by cooking.



Grapes need to be cut into quarters.



Cut cheese into small cubes.



Chicken with bones removed.



Oils and fats

Healthy fats are important for brain development and help meet your toddler's energy needs. Include some unsaturated fat in your child's meals and snacks, such as:

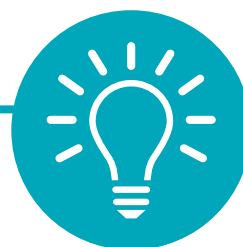
- ▶ Vegetable oils like canola, olive and soybean.
- ▶ Small amounts of salad dressing and mayonnaise.
- ▶ Soft non-hydrogenated margarines that are low in saturated and trans fats.

Aim to include more unsaturated fats vs. saturated fats. For more information see:

unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Heart-Health/Facts-on-Fats.aspx

Ideas to offer your child:

- ▶ Fatty fish (like salmon or rainbow trout)
- ▶ Whole (3.25% M.F.) milk or breast milk
- ▶ Yogurt with more than 2% M.F.
- ▶ Peanut butter and nut butters spread thinly on bread or crackers. Never serve these foods alone in a lump, as they could get stuck in the throat and block air flow.
- ▶ Avocado
- ▶ Hard cheese



Sample meal plan

The amount of food a child needs varies depending on age, growth rate, activity level and appetite. If your toddler is growing well then they are likely eating what they need. If you have questions about your child's growth or appetite, speak to your health care provider or a registered dietitian.

Breakfast

- ▶ Whole grain cereal
- ▶ Blueberries, fresh or frozen (thawed)
- ▶ Breast milk or milk* in a cup



Snack

- ▶ Yogurt with chopped banana
- ▶ Water



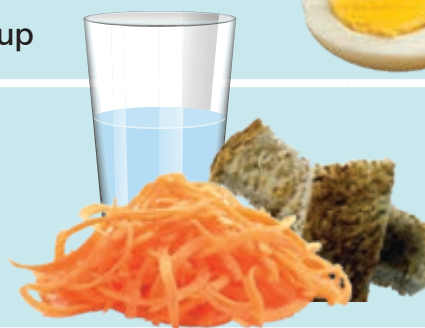
Lunch

- ▶ ¼ of an egg salad sandwich on whole grain bread
- ▶ Thin slices of pepper
- ▶ Thin apple slices
- ▶ Breast milk or milk in a cup



Snack

- ▶ Whole grain bread with smooth peanut butter
- ▶ Grated carrot
- ▶ Water



Supper

- ▶ Home cooked spaghetti with meat sauce
- ▶ Garden salad with leafy greens and salad dressing
- ▶ Canned peaches (in juice or water), cut in small pieces
- ▶ Water



Some children may need a snack between supper and bedtime.

Bedtime snack

- ▶ Mini muffin
- ▶ Breast milk or milk in a cup



* See page 14 for tips on milk intake for toddlers.

Food allergies

The most common allergenic foods include:

- ▶ Cow's milk
- ▶ Eggs
- ▶ Peanuts
- ▶ Tree nuts
- ▶ Fish
- ▶ Soy
- ▶ Wheat

Possible signs of an allergy are:

- ▶ A rash or hives
- ▶ Red and itchy skin
- ▶ Vomiting, diarrhea
- ▶ Trouble breathing or swallowing
- ▶ Swelling of the eyes, face, lips, throat and tongue

If you think baby has an allergy, do the following:

- ▶ Stop feeding the food you think caused the allergy.
- ▶ Make an appointment with your baby's doctor.

Toddlers who show severe or sudden allergy symptoms need immediate emergency care. If any of the following severe symptoms appear, take your toddler to the nearest emergency department or Community Health Centre right away. Phone 911 if the symptoms start immediately or quickly become worse.

Signs include:

- ▶ Difficulty breathing
- ▶ Unable to swallow
- ▶ Swelling of the tongue or inside the mouth
- ▶ Swelling inside the throat

If you have concerns about food allergies you can contact Yukon HealthLine at 811.



Looking for more information?

Talk to your health care provider, Community Health Nurse or a Registered Dietitian.

Whitehorse Health Centre..... 867-667-8864
..... toll-free in Yukon 1-800-661-0408 ext. 8864
Outside Whitehorse contact your local health centre

Visit yukon.ca/en/find-hospital-or-health-centre for a list of health centres.

To speak to a Registered Dietitian Monday to Friday 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. call 811

For information on Canada's Food Guide, visit food-guide.canada.ca/en.

Contact Health Promotion at health.promotion@gov.yk.ca or 867-667-3003.

yukon.ca/en/nutrition

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Photos of diced food (carrot, grapes, cheese and chicken) on pages 16, 17 and 20 in this publication are from *Feeding Baby Solid Foods: from 6 to 12 months of age*, Alberta Health Services, March 2008.

