

Things You Should Know: Your Toddler 18 months to 2 years

DIET

We encourage you to have regular family meals at the kitchen table. A decrease in appetite is common. Your child should not be forced to eat any food, but should be encouraged to try a variety of new foods. Avoid arguments with your child about the amount of food he or she eats. Children are often picky eaters at this age. It is best to offer 3 meals and 2 snacks per day.

- Offer finger foods to encourage your child to feed him or herself.
- Avoid giving the following foods to children under 3-4 years of age to prevent choking: grapes, nuts, apples, raw vegetables, popcorn and hard candy. Hot dogs, if you give them, need to be cut into thin circles, then each circle into fourths.
- Your child should be sitting down while eating. Your child can choke on anything.
- **Whole milk should be given until age 2 because fat and cholesterol are needed for brain growth. At age 2 years, switch to 1% or skim milk to reduce the risk of heart disease.** Milk should be offered at mealtimes. Your child should not drink more than 32 ounces or 1 quart of milk per day and should be drinking from a cup. The bottle should be gone.
- If your child is not a big milk drinker, then cheese, yogurt and cottage cheese can be good sources of calcium and vitamin D. If your child does not get 3-4 servings of dairy per day, we recommend a vitamin D supplement daily.
- **Do not give your child soda.** It takes calcium from the bones and causes tooth decay.
- **Avoid juice.** It has limited nutritional value and too much sugar. It is better to offer fruit than juice.
- We recommend using an open cup as much as possible. Sippy cups and bottles promote obesity and tooth decay.
- Limit the amount of candy and sweets.
- If the child's food is warmed in a microwave, the food must be stirred well to avoid "hot spots."
- Children should not have too much fat, salt or sugar in their diet.

SLEEP

- **At this age children need 11-14 hours of sleep per day including naps.**
- Most children continue to take one nap per day. Even if they sometimes do not sleep, it is wise for parents to insist on a quiet period of rest at a regular time each day.
- A regular bedtime routine will help your child move from active play to quiet time and rest. Bedtime book reading promotes language development and is often an effective part of a quiet bedtime routine. An object such as a favorite toy or blanket may be helpful. Having plenty of time for bath and bedtime stories will make bedtime less of a struggle. **The child should be expected to fall asleep in his or her own bed and to sleep through the night.**
- It is important to remember that parents need quiet time without kids, too. Getting your kids to bed early will leave part of the evening for you to relax and have quality time.
- Common sleep problems include resistance to falling asleep, nighttime awakening and night fears. If these problems disrupt family routines or cause daytime fatigue or irritability in the child or parent, they need to be addressed.

- Dreams may start around this age, so do not be alarmed if your child wakes up crying in the night for no apparent reason. Most of the time they can't remember why they woke up or what they were dreaming about. You might want to comfort your child in his or her own bed and give reassurance that all is well. You may rest with your child for a few minutes, but don't fall into the habit of having your presence required for him or her to fall asleep.

TEETH

- **Do not let your child carry a cup of milk or sweet drink around during the day because this can cause cavities. Milk should only be offered at meal times. Also, do not put your child to bed with a sippy cup.**
- **Brush your child's teeth twice a day with a dab of fluoride toothpaste on a soft brush.**
- **Your child should see a dentist every 6 months.**

POTTY TRAINING

The average age of potty training is 2 to 3 years old. The child will let you know when he or she is ready. Some of the signs of readiness are:

- Interest in imitating others using the toilet.
- Being unhappy about a soiled diaper.
- The ability to hold urine for 2 hours (for example, diaper is dry after a nap).
- Child has a word to signal the need to use the toilet.
- The ability to raise or lower pants or underwear.
- The desire to do it (frequently occurs later in boys).

It is important for parents to encourage or offer rewards for success. Do not push the behavior or punish for accidents.

LANGUAGE SKILLS

- **Read to your child every day.**
- Start pointing out objects to them and encourage them to say the word. By 18 months of age most children have about 18-20 words and by 2 years they have 50-100, with half being understandable.
- Receptive language skills (meaning they can understand you) come faster than expressive skills (speech).

SAFETY

This is a time when your child is exploring, climbing and getting into everything. Parents need to be even more watchful for injuries.

- **ALWAYS use a car seat. Your child must remain rear-facing until they reach the rear-facing weight or height limit of the seat and are at least 2 years of age.** Make sure your child fits the weight and height limits of the seat. See our Car Seat Guidelines handout for further details.
- Use security gates or lock the doors at stairwells or entrances to potentially dangerous areas such as the kitchen or basement. Window guards should be installed.
- Do not underestimate your child's ability to climb. Chairs should be positioned so that the child is unable to use them to climb to a dangerously high place.

- Guns in the home are a danger to the family. If a gun is kept in the home, the gun and the ammunition should be locked and stored in separate locations.
- Small children should not be allowed to play with plastic bags or balloons.
- Children should always be closely supervised in or near the water (swimming pool, bathtub, uncovered toilet seat, bucket of water).
- Keep your child away from hot stoves, space heaters, wall heaters, irons, curling irons and fireplaces. Pot handles should be turned toward the back of the stove. Hot liquids on tablecloths or on top of the stove should be closely monitored so they can't be pulled down.
- No one should hold or carry the child while drinking hot liquids or smoking.
- The hot water heater temperature should not be set above 120 °F.
- Plug outlets with plastic guards.
- **Children should wear hats and protective clothing and use sunscreen when going outside. Use a sunscreen that is "broad spectrum" with at least an SPF of 15. Apply the sunscreen 15-30 minutes before going outside.**
- Do not allow your child to play on or around cars, tractors or lawn mowers.
- Attach heavy furniture, such as bookshelves or dressers to the wall. These items could crush a child if they tip over. Kits to secure these items are available or "L" brackets can be installed.
- Keep all medicine, cleaning supplies and any potentially harmful substances up and out of reach in a locked cabinet. Remember there may be many of these items in your purse or grandma's purse, too. Many medications are brightly colored and may look like candy to your child.
- Keep the Poison Control Center number near your phone. **1-800-366-8888**
- Keep all outside gates and fences closed. Check to see if they are in good condition with no holes or sharp edges where the child could get caught.
- Have working smoke detectors and a simple fire safety plan, like where your family will meet outside.
- Carbon monoxide detectors are recommended.
- Never leave your child unattended in the car or at home.
- Your child should be closely supervised when outside.
- **Exposure to cigarette smoke causes many medical problems for your child. These include an increased number of upper respiratory infections (colds), asthma and ear infections. E-cigarettes, vaping and marijuana use can also cause harmful effects to your baby.**

DISCIPLINE

This is a good time for your child to gain confidence and independence. Discipline and positive reinforcement are very important. **Starting to enforce your rules and setting limits is very important at this age. Children like structure. Setting limits and having rules are part of that structure.** Having structure makes children feel loved and teaches them that there are expectations for each member of the family.

- Try not to only respond to negative behaviors but **praise your child's good behavior**. Tell them what they did right. This will help build self-esteem.

- **Be consistent because your child will test your limits daily. Say “no” only when you have to. Try re-directing your child instead of saying no.** Be sure to move the object the child has been asked not to touch or remove the child from the dangerous or forbidden situation.
- “Time outs” are usually an effective form of discipline and should be one minute for each year of life. Occasionally it may be necessary to hold the child during time out. Ask the child if he or she understands why the behavior is unacceptable, but then drop it after time out is over.
- **Temper tantrums are common. Ignore them.** Do not give in to the demands of the tantrum.

PARENTING TIPS

- “Catch ‘em being good.” Praise your child when he or she plays well with a friend. In contrast, negative consequences should follow unacceptable behavior. For example, your child cannot go out to play if he or she hits a playmate.
- Encourage curiosity; it is normal for your baby to “get into things.”
- **Read a book to your child every day.**
- Arrange time for each parent to have one-on-one time with each of their children.
- Pick up, hold and cuddle your baby.
- Establish family rules for mealtimes, bedtime and getting dressed.
- **Encourage your child’s independence.** Many conflicts between parent and child may be avoided by giving children two or three options. For example, “Do you want to wear your sweater or your jacket?” “Do you want milk or water?”
- **At this age, screen time should be limited to watching educational programs with a parent or caregiver.**

IMMUNIZATIONS AND WELL CHILD VISITS

- We would like to see your child at 2 years, 2 ½ years (30 months) and 3 years for well child visits.
- At the 18 month appointment your child will receive the Hepatitis A vaccine. There are no routine scheduled vaccines at age 2 or 3 years.
- At the 2 and 3 year check-ups your child will be tested for lead and anemia.
- Yearly Flu and COVID-19 vaccines are recommended.

Please do not hesitate to call or text the office with any questions or concerns