

TODDLER CARE from 15 to 18 Months

Are you ready? Your sweet loving baby is changing overnight into a toddler with wants and demands of his own. The toddler enters a world of negativism and ritualism. He is developing a sense of self and expressing this. This is healthy.

"No" means "no" or "yes"! And everything is often done according to a strict routine--mealtime, bedtime, playtime. However, this is a most exciting time for your toddler. Out of this period comes a child who exerts some independence and self-confidence, gradually separating himself from Mom.

Feeding

You may notice that your toddler has definite likes and dislikes! In fact, he may only want a certain food for lunch every day. He may also only want a certain cup and bowl as well. You may also notice that your toddler has a decrease in his appetite. All of this is normal. Growth is much less rapid than during the early months of the first year, so he does not need as much food now. Try to avoid making mealtime a battleground. Choose foods your child likes from the major food groups while encouraging a balanced three meals with two snacks a day. Some toddlers snack more frequently which is fine as long as healthy foods are offered.

Of the major food groups, a toddler needs: around 16-24 ounces of milk and milk products; 2 ounces of meat, poultry or fish group; 2-4 fruit servings; 2-4 vegetable servings; and 4 bread, cereal, rice, pasta group servings per day. At least one serving of fruit per day should be a citrus fruit or juice. A yellow or dark green vegetable should be served 3 to 4 times a week. A bread serving is 1/2 slice or 1/4 cup cereal. Remember: a tablespoon of each food group per year of life at a meal is adequate. A decreased appetite or "picky eater" at this age is normal, but if you offer the appropriate foods at each meal, your toddler will get an adequate diet. Hopefully your toddler can drink easily from a cup and uses a spoon, neither very neatly.

Continue good dental care. Brush your child's teeth twice a day using a small, soft toothbrush and plain water. Floss between teeth afterward. It is important that this become part of your toddler's routine to instill habits for a lifetime. Between the ages of 2 and 3, he will need to be taken to the dentist for a first checkup. Be sure to continue the fluoride supplement if your drinking water is not fluoridated. Some dentists recommend fluoride through at least age 8.

Sleeping

Most toddlers continue to need an afternoon nap after a morning of non-stop play. Some continue to take a morning nap as well. Bedtime should be consistent and follow a particular routine (brush and floss teeth, stories, lullabies, kisses and hugs, etc.). Because of a toddler's need for independence, bedtime problems can surface. If so, ask your doctor for management information or discuss the specific problem.

Elimination

Although toilet training is usually not advocated before the age of two, parents need to know signs of readiness to look for in their toddlers. These include: a dry diaper upon awakening from naps or in the morning; a regular time for bowel movements; an ability to say appropriate words for bowel movements and urination; an ability to recognize and say he is ready or has the urge to have a bowel movement or to urinate; an ability to pull clothing up and down or on and off; and a desire to please the parent(s). These signs develop throughout the toddler years on an individual basis and can vary greatly. Ask the doctor for more information.

Development\Play

Toddlers love to imitate their role models in the common rituals of our daily lives. Provide them with child-size brooms, dust cloths, or other safe household tools that can enable them to do this. Permit them to help you. Games and toys that enhance gross motor skills and dexterity are appropriate. These include large cardboard boxes, sandbox (with supervision), space to run and jump, and playground equipment. Quiet time activities include painting with water books, drawing with erasable crayons, building with blocks, working with puzzles, etc.

Your toddler will creep upstairs and walk without help. A toddler is still unstable and may lose his balance when throwing a ball or running. He may scribble spontaneously on everything including your walls and furniture. He enjoys identifying geometric shapes and placing them in the appropriate hole of the toy.

A toddler may say several words, understand simple commands and shake his head to mean no. Your toddler may begin to tolerate some separation from parent(s) and may be less likely to fear strangers. Your toddler's

emotions may change quickly from one minute to the next. He will kiss and hug his parents one minute and have a temper tantrum the next. This can be difficult to cope with! You may want to discuss additional parenting toddler resources with your doctor.

Continue to read to your toddler. Make reading a special time in order to build a foundation for life. Don't forget to let your child catch you in the act of reading, yet another example that lasts for life. Take the interruption as an opportunity to explain what you're reading. Offer your child a toddler type book to read next to you. Remember to monitor TV viewing for it can be a learning opportunity in small doses but is detrimental in excess

As toddlers begin the process of separation from parent(s), this may be a good time to introduce a babysitter. The benefit of quality time with other adults is significant and should be encouraged. You may want to ask for information on choosing a sitter from your health care provider.

Safety

Safety measures in your house and outdoors cannot be emphasized enough. Still the greatest risk to your child's health is a motor vehicle accident. It is impossible for you to protect your child during an accident by just holding him. Always use an approved safety seat in your car in the recommended manner; anchored, properly positioned, and secured.

There are many accident dangers including, burns, falls, drowning, and poisonings. Accidents are more common when your child is not adequately supervised or in a different setting such as at a relative's or friend's house. It is important to continuously reassess the safety of your toddler's play area and update it as necessary. In less safe areas and circumstances, extra attentive supervision is necessary. As your child becomes older it is harder to supervise him because of his increasing independence. It is important to train your child about safety -- what is safe and what is unsafe.

Communication and Discipline

Discipline is as important as safety training. Discipline should be used in a consistent manner. Toddlers develop and learn through exploration and require particularly close observation. Discipline should not be stifling to your child's eagerness for new experiences: instead it should set safe limits. The word "no" becomes important to success but may not always get the desired response from your child.

Your child's behavior will in part be guided by which of your expressions of feelings he wants to obtain. Children should be permitted to express their own feelings. At the same time parents, too, must express feelings. This teaches your child that having and expressing emotions is important for effective communications.

Temper tantrums can often be handled by ignoring them. After you determine that your toddler cannot hurt himself, then walk away. This will prevent you from becoming upset and angry and will not give your toddler an audience. If this is not possible put him in his crib, playpen or room for a time-out. You should address the problem in a calm voice, expressing your feelings. This helps you and helps your child to understand that it's all right to express feelings in okay ways.

Suggested Handouts, Readings and Videos

For this visit: Toilet Training, Nutrition for Toddlers, Sleep Problems in Toddlers, Temper Tantrums (if needed), Safety.

Additional Resources for Parents

General Child Care

Babyhood by P. Leach; Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care by B. Spock and M. Rothenberg; Caring for Your Baby and Young Child by American Academy of Pediatrics; Taking Care of Your Child by R. Pantell, J. Fries, and D. Vickery

Growth and Development

Toddlers and Parents by T. Brazelton. Parents Book for the Toddler years by A. Popper; The Second Twelve months of Life by F. Caplan; Your One-Year Old by L. Ames and F. Ilg

Communication and Discipline

Your Child's Self Esteem by D. Briggs; Parent Power by J. Rosemond; Parent Effectiveness Training or P.E.T. in Action by T. Gordon; How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk by A. Faber & E. Mazlish; When Your Child Drives You Crazy by E. LeShan; The Strong Willed Child by J. Dobson.

Other

Child of Mine. Feeding with Love and Good Sense by E. Satter; Feed Me! I'm Yours by V. Lansky; Mother's Almanac by M. Kelly and E. Parsons; Raising a Son: Parents and the Making of a Healthy Man by D. & J. Elium



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