

TODDLER CARE from 18 to 24 Months

Your toddler continues to have boundless energy and much curiosity. She is able to run but falls often. Your child's vocabulary increases daily as does her ability to imitate actions and behaviors. You may notice that while your toddler is tolerating periods of separation from you, she may develop dependency on "transitional objects" such as a stuffed animal, favorite blanket, or an old purse of Mom's. This is normal and relates to the fluctuating state of the toddler-self. Do not discourage your toddler from using a transitional object. She will give it up willingly when other coping skills are learned.

Feeding

Your toddler is on all table foods and whole milk now. Her normal requirements include three meals with two snacks a day. Some may snack more often. 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 have an adequate diet. Your toddler can drink easily from a cup and use a spoon; neither very neatly. Some toddlers can use a fork quite well and safely. Watch her carefully. Do not be surprised at the use of fingers which are still the preferred method of getting food quickly.

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, she will need to be taken to the dentist for her first checkup. Be sure to continue the fluoride supplement if your drinking water is not fluoridated. The dose increases after 24 months. Some dentists recommend fluoride through at least age 8.

Sleeping

An afternoon nap may still be required for your toddler as well as an early bedtime. Bedtime should be consistent and follow a particular routine (brush and floss teeth, stories, lullabies, kisses and hugs, etc.). Because of your toddler's need for independence, bedtime problems can surface. Occasionally, sleep problems can occur. If so, please ask your doctor for additional information.

Elimination

Although toilet training is usually not advocated much 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 morning; a regular time for bowel movements; an ability to say appropriate words for bowel movements and urination; and an ability to recognize and say she 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; have a desire to please parent. These signs develop throughout the toddler years and can vary greatly. Ask for information about training.

Development/Play

Your toddler is a great imitator and this should be encouraged. Provide safe toys that allow for the expression of feelings and imitation. These include: dolls, safe tools, house ware articles. Appliance boxes make great pretend houses, etc. Make sure objects have no sharp edges or small removable parts. Water play, such as washing plastic dishes, a bath, or small pool (all with supervision) also provide for imaginative play.

Your toddler can throw a ball overhand without falling and may enjoy push-pull toys. She may be able to climb stairs holding on to your hand but usually only one step at a time. Your child is able to put blocks on top of each other, perhaps 3 or 4 at a time. Toddlers continue to enjoy drawing or "scribbling."

As your toddler's vocabulary increases she is able to identify parts of the body, and is often beginning to use directional words such as "up, down, go, in, out, and come." Because she is also becoming aware of sexual differences, You should use and teach correct terms for bodily functions and parts. Curiosity with sexual anatomy is common, as is genital exploration. Self-touching of the genitals is a pleasurable activity for toddlers but not a true sexual experience. Toddler masturbation is normal. The less attention that the parent pays to this activity, the less the child will use this to get attention. If frequent in public, then encourage in private.

Toddlers do not know how to share yet. In fact, they play side by side but not together. Therefore, toys taken from each other will cause great disturbances including biting, pinching, hitting and temper tantrums. Removal

from the situation for a short period of time-out and a firm verbal reprimand usually alleviates the problem. Remove the toy if all else fails.

Continue to read to your toddler to increase vocabulary, instill a love of reading, and provide the closeness of one on one. This is especially important if you have more than one child. Now is the age to start trips to the library.

Safety

Continue to monitor your toddler's environment for safety factors. Accidents are her greatest threat. Plant ingestions represent an increasing hazard. The most common plant ingestions involve house plants. Frequently, fatal plant ingestions involve the extremely dangerous poisons contained in many berries and seeds. Your child should be taught not to touch or ingest these and other plant materials including mushrooms without first checking with you. If you are not sure about the potential danger a plant may represent, then contact your poison control center.

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 her. Always use an approved safety seat in your car in the recommended manner; anchored properly positioned and secured.

Review safety literature about the house, yard and pool. If your toddler has started to crawl out of her crib, lower the mattress to the lowest rung with the side down. This may be time to think about moving your toddler to a regular bed.

Communication and Discipline

Your child's behavior will in part be guided by which of your expressions of feelings she 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.

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 chance 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.

Often the natural or logical outcome of an act provide enough reward for your child. When reality's pressure is not sufficient, then your positive reinforcement is the desirable behavioral guidance your child needs.

Suggested Handouts, Readings and Videos

Handouts from previous visits should be reviewed as well as how immunizations were tolerated. (Parenting and Discipline, Toilet Training, Nutrition for Toddlers, Sleep Problems in Toddlers), Temper Tantrums (if needed), Preventing Accidental Ingestions (and any safety handouts not previously given).

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 or Touchpoints 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; Positive Discipline by J. Nelsen; 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; The Strong Willed Child by J. Dobson; Magic Years by S. Fraiberg; Without Spanking or Spoiling by E. Crary; Raising Your Spirited Child by M. Kurcinka.

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; Toilet Training in Less Than a Day by N. Azrin and R. Foxx; Raising a Son by D. & J. Elium; Raising a Daughter by J. & D. Elium



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