

Toddler Mealtime

Meals with toddlers can be a lot. Here are some tips for easing stress and starting healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime.



- **Consider the “caregiver provides, child decides” approach.** Nutritionist Ellyn Satter suggests that the adult chooses, prepares, and presents the food. Then the child gets to decide how much and whether to eat. It might be frustrating, but you can’t force them to swallow!
- **Offer choices.** Many children do better when they get to choose. You can say, “Pick which fruit you’d like with your yogurt: pear or apple.” They get to take some control while you serve something healthy either way.
- **Adjust your expectations.** Sitting still is tough for little ones. Keeping mealtimes short and routines consistent can help! It is normal for young children to refuse some foods. A “try, try again” attitude can ease frustration. By not forcing foods, you are respecting them and their growing tastes.
- **Assess your child’s food intake over a week.** Toddlers tend to eat unevenly. They eat more on some days and less on others. They might eat the same thing for four days in a row, and that’s okay. Remembering this can reduce stress about nutrition.
- **Lean into silliness.** Meals are more enjoyable if adults aren’t so serious. Sing a little song; share a funny story. Keeping mealtimes fun and frustration-free helps your toddler build a healthy relationship with food.

- **Eat together.** It may feel senseless to sit down to eat with your toddler. However, this is a wonderful time to start this family habit. They may not stay at the table long or eat much. But eating together now can become a tradition you love once your children are older.



- **Skip the screens.** It may seem like a good idea to use a TV, phone, or tablet to keep your child at the table. However, mealtimes are a great time to connect and chat. Also, using screens to distract your child may lead to them eating too much. They might not notice when they feel full.

- **Resist the urge to feed your toddler on the go.** Bringing snacks on outings makes sense. Toddlers have small stomachs and may need to eat between meals. However, feeding your little one while they run around is another story. This approach can become a habit and may lead to choking, too.

Remember that the toddler phase is short. Soon enough, your child will be better at sitting and focusing on eating. They will also get better at trying new foods! Your child will learn to sit longer and even have a pleasant conversation with you—eventually.

SCAN FOR MORE INFO

