

# Feeding Your Toddler



## HELPING YOUR TODDLER EAT HAPPY AND HEALTHY

Children will eat when they are hungry and stop when they are full. They are pretty good at getting their bodies what they need. Does this mean you should let your toddler eat whatever they want? No! You can offer nutritious choices and let your child decide which of those foods to eat and how much. Follow this simple saying: “Parent provides, child decides.”

Toddlers want to be in charge. They are also developing their own likes and dislikes. They tend to be inconsistent in their behavior, including at mealtimes. Sometimes they eat a lot, sometimes they don't. Toddlers' needs also change as they grow and develop. Many toddlers eat less than they did as babies, because they don't need as many calories.

No one wants to struggle with their toddler about food. However, your wishes may clash with theirs and result in mealtime battles. But if a child is growing normally and shows no signs of illness or other distress, they are probably getting enough food. Experts agree that most children will stop eating when they're full. This works as long as they are fed when they're hungry and not forced to eat when they are not.

## TIPS FOR PROMOTING HEALTHY EATING HABITS:

- **Establish regular family mealtimes.** Use this time to talk and enjoy each other's company. Create a fun, relaxed, and special time together. But don't expect they will sit for long! A fun 10-minute family dinner is probably the limit for many active toddlers.
- **Offer nutritious choices and keep portions small.** You can always offer more if they finish.
- **Give your child some control.** When possible, let them select from your choices of nutritious foods. Let your child decide when they are done eating.
- **Make mealtimes fun! Let your child help prepare the meal.** Offer finger foods and dipping sauce. Try cutting sandwiches into shapes.

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- **Model good eating habits.** Help your child learn by your healthy example.

You might try using treats to get kids to behave well or eat other foods. Using food to bribe or reward can give food a lot of power. Be careful with this, though, so food doesn't become a “fix” to make kids happy or sad. Talk to your HealthySteps Specialist about other strategies to help kids behave and eat well.