



How can I deal with some common toddler and preschooler feeding issues?

Feeding toddlers and preschoolers can sometimes be challenging. They are learning and mastering many new skills. At the same time they are striving for independence and demonstrating their own particular food preferences. Learning how to cope with these eating behaviours is important for parents and caregivers to ensure that their youngsters eat well. Here are some common toddler and preschooler feeding issues and strategies that you might try to solve them.

Situation	What can you do...
If your child wants the same food every day	Let your child have their "favourite food" as long as it is nutritious. Continue to offer other healthy choices at each meal. If a big fuss is NOT made your child will soon move on to another favourite food. Be aware that if preschoolers eat only a limited number of foods their intake of important nutrients will be limited.
If your child takes too long to eat	Be patient and give your child time to explore, touch and taste their food. Young children need time to experience food, to eat and to learn how to use utensils. After a reasonable amount of time (20-30 minutes) remove your child's plate without a fuss.
If your child refuses to eat	Respect your child's awareness of his own body. A child's appetite can vary from day to day and from meal to meal so he may not be hungry. Serve smaller amounts of food. Make sure snacks are served well before meal times (e.g. 1-2 hours). Avoid becoming a short order cook - children should get used to sharing the family meal. A skipped meal every once in a while is not a concern as long as your child is growing normally.
If your child refuses to try new foods	Continue to offer "new" foods and put small amounts on your child's plate whenever you eat them. Some children need to see a "new" food many times before they will try and accept it. Encourage your child to try a small bite. Avoid forcing your child to eat a "new" food as this can reduce acceptance. Introduce "new" foods to your child when other children are eating and enjoying that food. Let your child explore and help prepare the "new" food.

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If your child does not eat vegetables	Serve vegetables at snack time when your child is hungry. Offer a variety of brightly coloured vegetables so he can choose what he likes. Serve vegetables raw or lightly cooked (overcooking can make vegetables taste bitter). Be cautious serving raw vegetables to toddlers under 3 years old as they are at greater risk of choking. Purée or finely chop vegetables and put them in pasta sauce or soup. Involve preschoolers in choosing vegetables at the grocery store or market - or let them try growing their own garden.
If your child does not drink milk	Offer small servings (125 mL or 1/2 cup) but don't force it. Preschoolers should have at least 500 mL (2 cups) of fluid milk each day to get enough vitamin D. Yogurt and cheese provide calcium but not vitamin D. Serve milk at a temperature he likes. Use milk instead of water in cream soups, with pureed vegetables, in puddings and hot cereal. Talk to your family doctor or a registered dietitian before deciding if he needs a supplement.
If your child drinks too much milk	Milk can be filling and may leave less room for other healthy foods. Determine how much milk your child drinks and limit intakes if he or she is drinking too much. Aim for 2 cups (500 mL) per day. Do not give milk in a bottle. Milk should be served in a cup at set times such as at meal times.
If your child refuses to eat meat	Taste and difficulty chewing can turn some children away from meat. Make meat more appealing by cutting it into small bits and serving it in soups, stews, tomato sauce or meatloaf. Offer other protein foods such as eggs, fish, cheese, smooth peanut butter, soy foods, cooked dried beans or lentils. Increase iron intake by serving iron-fortified breads and cereals, dark leafy vegetables, eggs, cooked dried beans and lentils, and dried fruit such as raisins. Talk to a registered dietitian or your family doctor if your child does not eat any meat or dairy products. Your child may not be getting enough vitamin B 12.

Family mealtimes should be encouraged as often as possible in order for children to learn healthy eating habits.

Helpful books:

- *Better Food for Kids* by Diana Kalnins, RD and Joanne Saab, RD (The Hospital for Sick Children/Robert Rose Inc. 2002)
- *Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense* by Ellyn Satter, RD (Bull Publishing, 2000)
- *Meals without squeals: Child Care Feeding Guide and Cookbook* by Christine Berman (RD) and Jacki Fromer (Bull Publishing, 1997)

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