

Healthy Eating Habits and Learning Basic Table Manners for Toddlers

COLOR, VARIETY & ENCOURAGEMENT

❖ **Be a positive role model for your baby.** If they see you being enthusiastic about eating a variety of flavorful, healthy foods, they will be inspired to imitate you. Mealtimes should be relaxed and enjoyable.

- ♦ Try the food yourself and talk positively about what you like about it.
- ♦ If someone in your home is already a fussy eater, remind them not to model their dislike for the food in front of the baby.
- ♦ If you don't like a food that you do want your baby to enjoy, say something true yet upbeat about the food, such as "Grandma loves mushrooms, too!"

❖ **Remember that food is nourishment.** Don't teach your baby that some foods are rewards while others are a punishment.

❖ Whenever possible, **share what you're eating with your baby.** Try to choose foods for yourself that would be appropriate to share with them (although you may have to purée their portion).

- ♦ If you're cooking from scratch, separate out your baby's portion before you have added salt or sugar.
- ♦ Don't be afraid to let your older baby try flavorful foods, like garlic, herbs, and a moderate amount of spices.
- ♦ If you're eating out, try to order something that your toddler can safely share with you, rather than bringing "baby food" to the restaurant.
- ♦ Most Kids' Menu items are specifically designed for fussy eaters. It's better (and cheaper!) to share your own food with your toddler.

❖ **If your baby didn't seem to like a food the last time you offered it, don't set yourselves up for failure by mentioning that.** Babies sometimes take to a food after they've tried it a few times.

- ♦ Try serving a new food alongside one you already know the toddler likes. You can even serve two foods in the same spoonful.
- ♦ If your toddler has a tendency to fixate on foods she doesn't like, try to have a distracting conversation about things other than what's on the table.
- ♦ Serve your toddler in courses and start with the food she's less keen on. Sometimes hungry people are more willing to eat what's put in front of them!

❖ **Serve your toddler small portions** to start with. Full plates can seem daunting to a little one. She can always have seconds if she's up for more.

- ♦ A serving for a person is about the size of her own fist. A single strawberry can be considered a serving for a toddler!

❖ **Introduce your baby to new textures as soon as she's able to handle them.** Move on from purées to lumpier dishes to finger foods, so that she will be open-minded about enjoying foods with various textures.

❖ **Avoid letting your toddler "graze" all day with non-stop snacks.** Although she needs to eat more frequently than an adult, limit eating to three meals and a few substantial snacks per day.

❖ **Toddlers have hungry days and not-so-hungry days.** Don't worry if she doesn't eat much on any given day; she'll likely make up for it on another occasion. (If she's really not getting enough, your pediatrician will be able to notice this on your child's growth curve.)

❖ **Let your toddler pick out something at the supermarket.** Make sure you'd be happy with any of her choices. Ex. "What vegetable would you like to pick out for us to have with dinner tonight?"

❖ **Give your child the chance to help out in the kitchen.** Even a small task like rinsing off the produce can help her feel invested in the food.

❖ **If you garden, let her play a role choosing what you'll grow.** If she helps tend the plants, she'll likely be more enthusiastic about eating them.

❖ **Have fun with food.** Funny names can help. Try organizing finger foods on a plate as "art" with your toddler.

❖ Remember that **it's your job to provide healthy, flavorful foods** for your child, but that it's up to her to decide how much she wants to eat.

TEACHING TABLE MANNERS

(while minimizing mealtime messes)

❖ **While you're spoon-feeding your baby, give him his own spoon to play with.** When he's busy drumming, he's more likely to let you get the food into his mouth.

❖ **When serving finger food to your baby,** just put a few pieces on his tray to start with. Once he finishes that, he can have seconds if you like.

❖ **Babies learn by repetition.** If your baby throws food on the floor, he is likely trying to learn whether or not it will always fall and whether or not you will always pick it up. Rather than getting angry, narrate what's happening. Ex. "When we drop things, they always fall on the floor, and SOMETIMES I'll pick them up!"

- ♦ Then set limits to the mess making. Warn the baby not to throw any more food. If he still does, take him out of his chair, and tell him that the meal is over. If he's still hungry, you can make up for it with a snack later.

❖ **Teach good behavior by modeling it yourself.** If your child sits down to eat with his family, he will have more opportunity to learn table manners than if he eats alone.

❖ **Know that toddlers should not be expected to sit still for an hour-long meal in a restaurant,** so come prepared with quiet toys that will help him pass the time and stay entertained, since he will likely finish eating before you do.

❖ **Consider learning a few basic signs of baby sign language with your child.** Sometimes just being able to communicate "More" or "I'm full" can alleviate a lot of mealtime stress.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

http://www.whattoexpect.com/toddler-nutrition/picky-eater-problems.aspx?xid=ob_cc_toddler

<http://www.parenting.com/article/ask-dr-sears-table-manners-for-toddlers>

<https://karenlebillon.com/blog/>

<http://www.annabelkarmel.com/us/coping-fussy-eater/>