



Toddler mealtime struggles

Set the stage

- Create a calm environment during mealtime by turning off the TV.
- Keep their tray simple by limiting the amount of bowls, spoons, and cups.
- Use familiar objects at the table—seeing the same bib, bowl, and utensils is comforting.
- Sit down at the table to eat as a family and include your child in the conversation.

Minimize mealtime stress

- **Serving smaller-sized portions** (1 to 2 tablespoons) is the way to go—large portions may overwhelm your child.
- **Give them time** to chew, swallow, and even play a bit with new food. Playing with food is part of learning about it, which helps your child feed themselves. Rushing your child takes the fun out of eating and adds stress.
- **Embrace the mess!** It will make the feeding experience more pleasant for you and your baby. Let them explore even if it does get messy—Toddlers often need to look at, touch, smell, and taste a food before eating it.
- **Patience is key.** If your Toddler rejects a food, it might just be that they don't recognize it. Children can often be “neophobic,” meaning they're afraid of anything new and prefer eating foods they're used to. Try not to

get frustrated—instead of giving up on a rejected food, prepare it in a different way and offer it again.

- **Serve a variety of healthy foods**, and set a good example by eating them yourself. When your Toddler sees Mom, Dad or their siblings eating a nutritious food, they may be more willing to try it.
- **Include a food they're used to** in their meal, and then let your child choose if they want to try the other foods on their tray. Don't prepare a separate meal—it could encourage your little one to continue this type of behavior at mealtime.
- **Pay attention** to your Toddler's hunger and fullness cues. Your role is to decide what foods to offer and when to offer them, but let your child decide whether to eat and how much to eat.
- **Let your Toddler pick out a fruit or veggie** at the grocery store, and then let them help you prepare it. Children are more likely to try foods they help prepare.
- **Don't bribe them with sweets.** This teaches them that some foods are desirable while others aren't.
- **Be realistic.** Your child may never love Brussels sprouts, but you can help them learn the joy of trying new foods at the dinner table.

It's not uncommon for Toddlers to resist eating certain foods or only want to eat a couple of foods for a period of time. During the Toddler years, it's more important to focus on their eating pattern over several days instead of meal-by-meal. If you feel there's a lasting problem that might affect your child's healthy growth and development, talk to your pediatrician.

Try these suggestions to help your toddler avoid picky behavior:

- As a parent, it's your job to offer healthy foods. It's up to your child to decide how much and what they will eat from the choices you provide. Avoid the power struggles!
- Offering the same foods over and over may not feel productive, but keep in mind, Toddlers may need to try a food up to 10 times before they accept it.
- Talking to your Toddler about foods you see in the grocery store or how you

prepare food while cooking can help familiarize them with new foods.

- Rejecting food may be your child seeking attention or trying to control the situation. Avoid this conflict by staying positive and encouraging during mealtime.
- Make food fun. Making faces with vegetables on a plate or stacking vegetables in a tower can add kid appeal.
- Think like a kid. Children have short attention spans. Limit mealtimes to 20 to 30 minutes to help focus attention on eating. If they're not done eating in a reasonable amount of time, remove the food and have them move along with their day.
- Toddlers may be more interested in foods they can feed themselves.

Overall, a positive, enthusiastic attitude, praising your child for trying new foods, giving small token rewards like a sticker and reading food-themed books can help encourage your child to accept a new food.