



Children's<sup>SM</sup>  
Healthcare of Atlanta

# The No-Stress Way to Feed Your Toddler

## Ages one to three

Spending time with a two-year-old can be a workout. A toddler knows what he wants and he wants it now! But what you might think of as bossy or sassy is really just a child learning to declare his independence. This may be most obvious when it comes to snacks and mealtime—he wants to control food and eating it, too.

That's the beauty of the Ps and Cs. It reminds you to let your child CHOOSE. And it gives him a chance to start to take control of his own nutrition. As long as you stick with the Ps, you should enjoy fewer tantrums and more smiles around the table.

## Parents' jobs—the 3 Ps

### Plan for a positive eating experience

- **Set aside time** — Serve three meals and two or three snacks a day, always around the same time. Only offer water in between meals and snack times.
- **Eat together** — Eat your meals and snacks as a family, sitting down at the table.
- **Set rules and limits** — When your child decides to throw food or pour milk on the floor, calmly end the meal for him and ask him to help clean up.



### Prepare and put food on the table

- **Keep it simple** — Don't put anything on the table you don't want him to eat.
- **Cut it up** — Slice his food into small pieces, so he can feed himself.
- **Make it appealing** — Serve a variety of foods, including at least two colorful veggies and fruits.

### Provide with patience

- **Let him feed himself** — Give him a fork, but know it's OK if he chooses to use his fingers. Step in and help if he needs it.

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- **It takes time** — Some toddlers eat slowly. Mastering a new skill doesn't happen overnight!
- **Offer, offer, offer** — Some children need to see a new food 10-15 times before deciding to try it. Keep offering new and previously refused foods, along with foods he usually eats.

## Child's jobs—the 3 Cs

### Choose to eat (or not to eat)

- **The right to refuse** — Don't panic if your child doesn't want to eat. Calmly clean up and say, "Did you get enough to eat? Remember, we won't be eating again until lunch time." Resist the urge to offer him "anything, just to get him to eat!" You can offer him water in between snack and mealtimes, but otherwise, accept that he's chosen not to eat and will be just fine until next time.

### Choose what to eat (from what you provide)

- **Give, don't force** — Offer, but don't pressure your child to try each food on his plate.
- **This or that** — If your child asks for something different, calmly offer two alternatives from what you have planned. For example, "We don't have chips. Would you like a banana or orange with your yogurt?"

### Choose how much to eat

- **Start small** — Put just a spoonful of each food on your toddler's plate so it isn't overwhelming. Let him choose to ask for more of any food on the table.
- **No "Clean Plate Club"** — Forcing your child to finish his plate can lead to overeating now and bad habits down the road.
- **No bribery** — Incentivizing your child to eat his dinner with dessert can lead to a power struggle or tantrum.

### Tips on toddlers and drinks

- Give your toddler an open cup for sipping water or milk at snack and mealtimes. Continuing to use a bottle or cup with a spout can cause cavities and speech issues.
- Think water for thirst and milk for nutrition. There is nothing in a sugary drink that is good for your toddler's body. Avoid juice, soda, sports drinks, tea or lemonade. Even though it is made with fruit, juice has as much sugar as other sugary drinks. Whole fruit is always a healthier choice.

## Remember, *how we feed our families is just as important as what we feed our families.*

With just a little planning (and a little courage, too), you can set the table for success. With Strong4Life's Ps and Cs, snack and mealtime can be happier and healthier for your whole family!