

# TODDLERS - tips for fussy toddlers

## Fact sheet

A toddler who refuses to try a new food at least half of the time can be defined as a fussy eater. About half of all toddlers fit this description, so it's no surprise that food issues can be a source of stress for parents. Eight out of ten Australian parents are concerned about their child's eating habits and one third worry that their child isn't eating enough<sup>1</sup>.

### PERSEVERE WITH NEW FOODS

Believe it or not - it is important to offer an individual food to a toddler at least ten times. It often takes a long time before the toddler will choose to eat a new food.

Toddlers are very good at judging their hunger signals and when they feel full. It is understandable that you may feel worried about your toddler's eating habits, but try to keep calm. Remember, your toddler won't starve themselves. . . If they are hungry they will eat.

### SET AN EXAMPLE

As you know toddlers are great at copying others and they will always want the foods they see you eating. So it's worthwhile to look at your own diet. Research indicates that while twenty-seven percent of toddlers are fussy eaters, twenty-two percent of their parents admit to being fussy eaters too<sup>1</sup>.

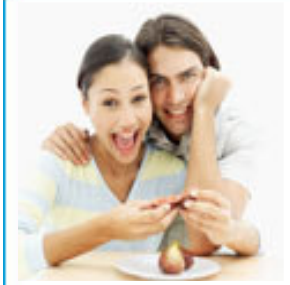
Good food habits learnt in childhood can last a lifetime. You can really guide toddlers and help them develop healthy eating habits. Be a good role model, eat what you want them to eat!

### MAKE FOOD FUN

There is no reason why mealtime shouldn't be fun! Toddlers can explore the colours, tastes and textures that different foods have through play. This will help increase your toddler's curiosity about particular foods.

Let your toddler help you prepare food. A toddler can safely tear lettuce for a salad or peel bananas - it's child's play!

Making up stories about food can create great interest for toddlers. Why are apples red? Where does milk come from? Food stories, play and preparation are a great way to bring parents and toddlers together in a happy, stress-free atmosphere!



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### TIPS FOR MEALTIMES<sup>2</sup>

- > If it works with your timetable, plan some days when the family can eat together. It's good to teach your toddler that mealtimes are enjoyable and social occasions.
- > Offer a range of foods on your toddler's plate and allow them to pick and choose what they will eat.
- > Be inventive. If your toddler refuses vegetables, look for ways to "hide" them. Try mashing or mincing potato, pumpkin or peas into casseroles or grating zucchini and carrot into rissoles and lasagne.
- > Encourage your toddler to touch and play with food. This can be messy, but plan to catch the spills.
- > Let your toddler feed themselves, but give them bite sized pieces and hang around while they are eating.
- > Remember, toddlers have small tummies! Offer small servings of food and allow them to ask for more.
- > At the end of the meal, take your toddler's plate away. If they haven't eaten much, offer them a healthy snack a little later on, such as a yogurt or a piece of fruit.



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### References

1. Better Health Channel. *Toddlers and fussy eating* [cited 2007 18 January]; Available from: [http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Metabolism\\_explained?OpenDocument](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Metabolism_explained?OpenDocument).
2. McVeagh, P. and E. Reed, *Kids, food, health*. Vol. 2. 2001, Sydney: Finch Publishing.

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