Toddler Feeding Issues

During the toddler years (ages 1 to 3 years), parents have many concerns about their child’s eating habits. Children become more independent at this age and their growth begins to slow down. A child who may have been very easy to feed as an infant may be difficult to feed as a toddler.

Normal toddler eating behaviors may include:

- Having a smaller appetite compared to when he was an infant
- Being a picky eater
- Eating a lot one day and little the following day
- Being a messy eater; throwing or playing with food
- Being picky about how the food is set on the plate
- Wanting the same food over and over again
- Not sitting still for meals

Things to try:

- Let your child feed himself with supervision. He is likely to eat more this way.
- Sit down and eat with your child at the table.
- Children should not walk around with food. They may choke.
- Never force a child to eat. This may lead to eating problems in the future.
- Do not continue to feed your child if he is playing with the food. This probably means he is not hungry.
• Offer nutritious foods.

• Offer two choices to allow your child to have some control.

• Allow 20-30 minutes for meals. When a child is rushed, he may rebel and not want to eat.

• Your child should not drink from a bottle. This is a harmful behavior for his teeth.

• Limit distractions during mealtime.

• Do not offer snacks or drinks 30 minutes before or after meals. When you wait 30 minutes, your child will eat more because he is not full from food or fluids.

• Limit milk to 2-3 cups (16-24 ounces) per day. Milk contains little iron. Drinking large amounts can result in a low blood count.

• Limit juice to 4-6 ounces per day. Too much juice can result in poor nutrition.

• Cut food into small, pea-sized pieces. Some foods such as hotdogs and grapes can cause choking.

• Set good eating examples. Your child will copy your behavior.

• Remember, toddlers will eat enough on their own to grow!

**Please call your health care provider if:**

• Your child is not growing or gaining weight.

• Your child is always thirsty.

• Your child has an increase in urine output.

• You need suggestions for healthy meals.

• You need suggestions for making mealtime fun and productive.