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.