

PE D I A T R I C S

of
Northeastern Pennsylvania

Your 2½ Year Old Child

Your child is 2 ½, where has the time gone? This is an exciting time as older toddlers are using their growing language skills to tell you what they are thinking and feeling. They are even beginning to develop a sense of humor and are building friendships with other children. Their growing physical skills – walking, running and climbing – help them explore the world in more adventurous ways.

Nutrition

Rest assured that extreme fluctuations in appetite are fairly typical toddler eating habits. So while it's important to offer your child three regular meals and two or three healthy snacks a day (think of it as six mini-meals), be prepared for the fact that on some days the food will get eaten and on other days it won't.

When your toddler isn't in the mood to eat, resist the urge to force him into eating past the point when he's full because this can really backfire. It may teach him to ignore his hunger and fullness signals, and that can lead to overeating and weight gain later in life. If your toddler consistently doesn't seem interested in eating, however, track how much milk or juice he's drinking. If it's more than 20 ounces of milk and six ounces of juice a day, all that liquid could be filling him up so that he's not hungry at mealtime. Scale back a bit on the beverages and see if his appetite improves.

Look at the big picture, even more important than how much your toddler eats at any single meal is that he eats a variety of healthy foods in general. Don't offer foods that are less healthy just to get your toddler to eat. There will be good days and bad days, but if your child is gaining weight appropriately, developing normally, and is active and energetic, then you can be confident that he's getting plenty to eat.

Fluoride supplements are still needed, and brushing teeth twice a day is a must. Your little one might like to do it himself but be sure to help him as he doesn't yet have the dexterity to get all his teeth clean.

Safety

Your child has tons of energy and is always on the move. Therefore, safety is a big concern. All that childproofing you already did should remain in place. Double check to make sure it is still in working order. When outdoors you need to be with your child at all times, you can't count on your toddler to stop if you yell, you need to be close enough to physically stop him.

Always use an approved car seat, now is the time to check the height and weight requirements of your car seat to make sure it has not been outgrown. A seat with a five point harness is the safest car seat for this age. Teach your child to hold hands when around cars or crossing the street.

Never leave your child alone near any water. Always stay with your child when swimming. "Floaties" and "bubbles" are to help children learn to swim, not to prevent drowning.

Lock up all chemicals, and always keep the POISON CONTROL phone number handy. 1-800-222-1222

Sleeping

This is the age when your toddler is likely to make the transition from crib to bed, probably because he'll have outgrown his crib. Other reasons to consider making the move include frequent climbing out of the crib and toilet training — your child may need to get up at night to go to the bathroom.

Between their second and third birthdays, toddlers need about 11 to 12 hours of sleep a night and a single 1 ½ to 2 ½ hour nap each afternoon. Your toddler may start to discontinue his or her afternoon nap. If an afternoon nap is affecting bedtime you may need to make the naps shorter or a little earlier in the day. If naps are a thing of the past try for some quiet time in the afternoon to help your child reenergize.

Toilet Training

Most kids are interested in toilet training and have started it, many have completed it. Encourage toilet training and provide positive reinforcement. Toilet training and hygiene should go hand in hand as toddlers are now old enough to wash and dry their own hands, and both boys and girls should be encouraged to do this every time after using the toilet.

Parenting Tips

Give your child plenty of praise and attention for good behavior and limit attention for defiant behavior. Spend a lot more time praising good behaviors, than punishing bad ones. Encourage your child to use their words instead of pointing. Play-dates are great for this age, although your child may not be good at sharing. Help your child with conflicts about sharing and taking turns.

Limit screen time to no more than an hour a day. Too much TV can actually restrict a child's ability to think and imagine. Encourage a lot of physical activity instead.

Immunizations

Please refer to the immunization chart in the baby book or the American Academy of Pediatrics' website (www.aap.org)

Growth & Development

Children this age often copy others, particularly adults or older children. They get excited about other children and will begin to play with other children instead of parallel play. If you have not already seen it, your child may start to show defiant behavior. The truth is, dealing with a defiant 2-year-old is a notoriously difficult part of childrearing. (They don't call it the "terrible twos" for nothing.) When your child shouts, "No!" or hurls himself on the ground, kicking and screaming, it's no fun for you, but it is a normal reaction for a child this age. Your child is caught up in the excitement – and frustration – that come with his budding autonomy. He wants to explore his world and test his limits. At the same time he's struggling to learn how to control his actions, impulses, and feelings. Providing opportunities for your child to make her own choices allows him to try out some of her newfound autonomy in a controlled environment. Instead of demanding that she put on the jeans you've selected, for instance, let her choose one of the two pairs you've laid out. Ask if she'd like peas or green beans with dinner, and which of two stories at bedtime. As long as you're patient and consistent, your youngster will eventually learn that defiance isn't the way to get what she wants. Constant supervision and redirection are the most effective parenting tools. Remove your child kindly but firmly from what she can't do and give her an activity she can do.

Your child will likely be talking in short sentences and will repeat words overheard in conversation. If you do not already watch what you say in front of your child, now is the time to start.

At this age, the typical child can: Find hidden objects, kick a ball, run, walk up and down stairs holding on, climb well, throw a ball overhead, copy a circle or straight line, sort shapes and colors, follow 2-step instructions (eg. "pick up your coat, put it in the closet.") and name items in a picture book.

How you can help your child's development

1. Hide toys around the room and let him find them.
2. Help your child do puzzles with shapes, colors or animals. Name each piece as you go.
3. Encourage your child to play with blocks, help with building towers and knocking them down
4. Do art projects with crayons, paper and paint
5. Kick a ball back and forth, once your child is good at this, ask them to run and kick the ball.
6. Encourage your child to dress and undress himself.

Please remember these are "typical" milestones but variations are to be expected. Please call our office if you have any questions.