

Caring for your child: 15–18 months

Feeding your child

- The advantages of breastfeeding continue for you and your toddler as long as you continue to breastfeed.
- You and your child should decide the best time to wean. Continue as long as it is working well for both of you. Gradual weaning is best.
- If you've been bottle-feeding, start to wean by encouraging your child to drink liquids from a cup.
- Continue to give your child whole cow's milk or full-fat soy milk to drink, unless your child's doctor advises you to switch to low-fat or nonfat milk.
- Let your child decide how much to eat. Many children eat less at this age.
- Most children eat 3 meals a day plus snacks.
- Include your child in family meals.
- Offer a variety of nutritious table foods. Watch out for choking. Don't feed nuts, hard candies, whole hot dogs, popcorn, grapes, raw vegetables, raisins, gum, or seeds.
- Talk to the doctor about whether your child needs vitamins or other supplements.

Practicing healthy habits

- Don't let anyone smoke in your home or car. Smoking around your child increases their risk of ear infections, asthma, and pneumonia.
- Don't put your child to bed with a bottle, or breastfeed at night. Children at this age do not need to be fed at night. Night feeding can lead to tooth decay.
- Brush your child's teeth after meals and at bedtime every day. It is okay to use a tiny "pea-size" amount of toothpaste when your child is able to spit it out.
- Put your child to bed with clean teeth.
- Make sure the doctor checks your child's mouth at each visit.
- If your drinking water is not fluoridated, ask your doctor if your child needs fluoride. Fluoride drops may be recommended to prevent tooth decay.
- Protect your child's skin from sun exposure with protective clothing and sunscreen (SPF 15 or higher).

Keeping your child safe

- Use a car seat for every ride. Experts recommend keeping your child in a rear-facing car seat for as long as possible. Be sure that it is properly installed in the back seat. For information on choosing the safest seat for your child, call toll-free **1-800-282-5587** or visit www.800BUCKLUP.org.
- Watch your child at all times when near water (bathtub, pool, hot tub, etc.). Make sure your child is wearing a life jacket when near water.
- Prevent your child from grabbing hot items (pots, curling irons, irons, coffee cups). Install smoke detectors and check them regularly. Make sure all electrical outlets are covered.
- Keep cleaning products and medicines out of your child's reach, in locked cabinets. Don't keep medicines in your purse. If you think your child has been poisoned, call Poison Control at **1-800-222-1222** (voice and TDD). Keep the phone number near your phone.
- Review child-proofing checklist (see 6-month handout).

Understanding temper tantrums

Facts about tantrums

- Tantrums are normal. They often occur from 1 to 5 years of age. They are a child's way of expressing anger and frustration.
- Tantrums are not a sign of "bad" parenting or a "bad" child.
- They are more common when a child is tired, hungry, or sick.

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Preventing tantrums

- Be consistent with discipline, but understand that hearing “no” all the time will frustrate your child.
- Praise good behavior.
- Be patient. Don’t yell or spank.
- Have regular naps times for your child.
- Offer regular meals and snacks.
- Remove toys that often lead to tantrums.
- Teach your child how to express their needs and desires with words.

Managing tantrums

- If your child is frustrated or tired, comfort and soothe them. Praise what they’re doing well. Be understanding. Put them to bed if they’re tired, and feed them if they’re hungry.
- If your child is being overly demanding, ignore the tantrum. Move to a different room so your child doesn’t have an audience. Reasoning with your child usually makes tantrums worse. Don’t give in to tantrums.
- If your child is refusing to do something, don’t overreact. Many toddlers will say no to almost any request. Don’t punish them just for saying no. If your child refuses to do something important like going to day care, gently pick them up and take them there. If your child refuses to do something unimportant, let it go. Choose your battles carefully and don’t yell or spank. That makes tantrums worse.
- If your child is being disruptive, such as having a tantrum in a public place, remove your child from the situation for 2 to 5 minutes. Don’t yell. Talk in an even, neutral tone. Allow your child time to calm down.
- If your child is totally out of control, such as screaming wildly or throwing themselves backward, or is in danger of self-injury, hold them until they start to relax (usually 1 to 3 minutes) or put them in a safe, quiet place to calm down.
- If they are holding their breath during a severe temper tantrum, try not to overreact, which will reinforce the behavior. Some children will even turn blue and faint for a short period of time, but they will awaken within 60 seconds.

Other parenting tips

- Play games, talk, sing, and read stories to your child every day.
- Potty training usually begins sometime between 2 and 3 years. Let your child’s cues be your guide.
- Never leave your child alone in the house or car.
- It is normal for some children to walk with toes pointed in or out at this age.
- If discipline is needed, say “no,” then physically move child away from the dangerous situation.

WEBSITES

- Kaiser Permanente: kp.org/wa
- American Academy of Pediatrics: aap.org

SUGGESTED READING

- *Your Child’s Health*, Schmitt
- *What to Expect the Toddler Years*, Eisenberg
- *Raising your Spirited Child*, Kurcinka

Next well-child visit at 24 months old

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