

# Caring for your child: 3 years

## Feeding your child

- Include your child in family meals. Have a pleasant conversation at mealtime with TV off.
- Give your child low-fat or nonfat cow's milk or soy milk to drink (about 2 cups a day).
- Offer a variety of nutritious foods, including 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily. Even if your child doesn't seem to like them at first, keep trying.
- Avoid sodas, chips, fast foods, and sweets.
- Talk to the doctor about whether your child needs vitamins or other supplements.
- Avoid foods that can cause choking (whole hot dogs, nuts, chunks of meat, cheese, peanut butter, whole grapes, hard or sticky candy, popcorn, or raw vegetables).
- You decide when and what your child eats. Let your child decide whether and how much to eat.
- Don't bribe or reward your child with food.

## Practicing healthy habits

- Maintain regular bedtime and waking routines.
- Don't keep a TV in your child's bedroom.
- Limit TV, video, and computer time to one hour a day. Avoid programs and games with violence or sex.
- Help your toddler brush their teeth after meals and at bedtime every day. It is okay to use a tiny "pea-size" amount of toothpaste.
- Make sure the doctor or dentist checks your child's mouth regularly.
- If your drinking water is not fluoridated, ask your child's doctor about fluoride. Fluoride supplements may be recommended to prevent tooth decay.
- Help your child wash their hands after using the potty.
- Encourage daily physical activity with the whole family.
- Protect your child from sun exposure with protective clothing and sunglasses. Use sun block (SPF 15 or higher) on your child before they go into the sun. Repeat every 2 hours. Buy new sunscreen once a year. It loses its effectiveness after 12 months.
- Don't let anyone smoke in your home or car. Smoking around children increases their risk of ear infections and asthma.

## Keeping your child safe

- Use a car seat for every ride. Properly install the car seat in the back seat of the car. It's the safest place for children. If your vehicle doesn't have a back seat that will allow a car seat to be safely installed, make sure to turn off the passenger side front airbag. Front seat airbags have been involved in the deaths of some children and small adults. For information on choosing the safest seat for your child, call toll-free **1-800-282-5587** or visit **www.800BUCKLUP.org**.
- Prevent poisoning. Store all medicines, drugs, poisons, and alcohol in a locked cabinet, out of sight. Keep purses out of reach. If you think your child has been poisoned, call Poison Control at **1-800-222-1222** (voice and TDD). Keep the number near your phone.
- Prevent falls. Put locks or guards on all windows above the first floor.
- Prevent drowning. Watch your child at all times near any kind of water. Make sure they always wear a life jacket around water.
- If your child is in a home that has a gun, make sure it is unloaded and locked up.
- Teach your child not to accept anything from strangers and not to leave with strangers.

## Tips for potty-training

### Potty-training refusal

- Any child older than 3 years who is not potty trained after several months is usually resisting and not ready.
- Avoid reminding, lecturing, nagging, and punishing. It can make things worse and delay potty training.
- Signs of refusal include wetting or soiling themselves, trying to hold back bowel movements, and constipation.
- Your child will learn to use the toilet on his or her own timetable.

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### Ways you can help

- Your child will decide to use the potty after they realize that there is nothing left to resist. Have one last talk about potty training. Tell your child that their body makes “pee” and “poop” every day and it belongs to them. Tell them that the “poop wants to go in the toilet” and their job is to “help the poop get into the toilet.” Tell your child from now on he or she doesn’t need help. Then stop all talk about potty training. Keep your child in diapers to take away the anxiety, not as punishment or to cause embarrassment.
- Give praise, smiles, hugs, and kisses for any success. Rewards can include toys, reading a favorite story, or a trip to the park. Sometimes it helps to have one big reward (doll, fire truck), kept where your child sees it, that must be earned by using the toilet every day. Place stars on a calendar to keep track of your child’s success.
- Be alert to constipation. Some children will hold on to bowel movements while learning to potty train. That can lead to painful constipation (hard bowel movements), making the child hold on to bowel movements even more. If this happens, stop all potty training. Put your child in diapers at naptime and bedtime. Give your child natural fiber, such as bran muffins, oatmeal, whole-wheat toast, or prune juice to help soften bowel movements. Talk with your child’s doctor if that doesn’t work.

### Other parenting tips

- Read to your child every day. One way children learn to read is by hearing the same story over and over.
- Show affection and have fun with your child. Play games, talk, and sing with your child every day.
- Have your child do simple chores.
- Praise and reward good behavior. Apply rules fairly and in the same way every time.
- Don’t yell or spank. Be a good role model.

### Feeding children 3 to 5 years old

Now is the time to help your child learn good eating habits. Provide 3 balanced meals a day, plus snacks. Offer a variety of foods. Let your child help in the kitchen. They are more likely to eat food that the two of you fix together. Remember that portion sizes for children are not the same as for adults. A serving size for your child is what will fit into the palm of your child’s hand.

### A balanced meal plan includes:

- Fruits at least 2 to 3 times a day.
- Vegetables at lunch and dinner, and as snacks.
- Lots of grains. Give foods made from wheat, corn, rice, oats, or other grains (breads, cereals, tortillas, noodles, crackers, etc.) at every meal and for snacks.
- 2 cups of low-fat or nonfat milk products, including yogurt and cottage cheese.
- Protein foods twice a day. Best choices are lean meat, poultry, fish, eggs, or legumes (dried beans, peas, lentils, or soy products).

### Help your child get the best possible nutrition by:

- Giving water when thirsty. Avoid fruit drinks, punch, soda pop, and other sweet drinks.
- Avoiding candy, chips, and other junk foods.
- Reading labels when you go shopping. Choose healthy snacks that are low in sugar, fat, and salt.
- Choosing snacks that include:
  - cereal with milk
  - graham crackers
  - fresh fruit
  - crackers
  - wheat toast
  - yogurt

### WEBSITES

- Kaiser Permanente: [kp.org/wa](http://kp.org/wa)
- American Academy of Pediatrics: [aap.org](http://aap.org)
- Bright Futures: [brightfutures.org](http://brightfutures.org)

### SUGGESTED READING

- *Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense*, Satter
- *How to Get Your Child to Eat ... But Not Too Much*, Satter
- *Your Child’s Health*, Schmitt
- *What to Expect the Toddler Years*, Eisenberg
- *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5*, American Academy of Pediatrics

### Next well-child visit at 4 years old

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