It's common for toddlers to go through a stage of fussy eating. A toddler’s growth rate slows in the second year of life, so their appetite may decrease & they may not eat as much food as before. Naturally, parents can worry their little one is missing out on important nutrients. Remember, healthy children have good appetite regulation –usually they eat when they’re hungry & it’s normal for them to eat well on some days, and eat very little on other days!

Some Helpful Tips

- Too much milk can spoil your toddler’s appetite for food. Around 2 cups (500-600mL) of milk a day is enough for most toddlers.
- Offer milk or water after or in-between meals so your toddler doesn’t fill up on liquids before a meal.
- Plan mealtimes when your toddler isn’t too tired.
- New foods may be rejected at first, but continue to offer small portions - repeated tastings help toddlers accept new foods.
- Don’t allow your toddler to decide which foods are on offer! Keep offering a wide variety of foods even if they are rejected at first.
- Allow your toddler to decide how much food is enough - children have good appetite regulation. Insisting they clean their plate can teach them it’s OK to overeat.
- Be a good role model by eating a wide variety of foods- don’t expect your toddler to eat foods other family members refuse!
- If your child isn’t hungry at dinner time, consider limiting or skipping the afternoon snack.
- If a meal is refused, let your child sit quietly for a few minutes before leaving the high chair or table. Don’t offer treats or desserts to replace uneaten food, or children learn that by refusing a meal they’ll get a treat instead.
- Don’t use food as rewards or bribes- this leads to foods being labelled ‘good’ or ‘bad.

Make Mealtimes a Positive Experience:

- Let your child explore food by touching, and expect some mess!
- Let your child feed themselves & give help if needed.
- Eat together as a family - your child watches and learns from you.
- Children enjoy company at mealtimes - often your child will eat more, or try new foods around other children.
- Set clear boundaries at mealtimes - make it clear good behaviour is expected, but avoid turning mealtimes into a battleground!

Remember Fussy Eaters don’t starve!
Even though it can be a challenge at times, it’s a good idea to get your toddler started with healthy eating habits right from the word go. Although they’re probably eating most family foods, remember toddlers are not just ‘little adults’. For their small body size, toddlers have greater nutrient needs than adults and because they have little tummies they need small regular meals and snacks over the day.

**Healthy Eating**

It’s important to offer a wide variety of foods, because no single food will provide all the nutrients a toddler needs to grow, develop and stay healthy.

- Toddlers need 3 meals a day with small snacks in-between.
- Toddlers need to be offered a wide variety of foods.
- Toddlers get all the fibre they need from fruits, vegetables, breads and cereals. They don’t need very high-fibre foods like bran cereals and heavy grain breads.
- Toddlers need a little more fat in their diet than adults to meet their high energy needs. Low fat diets aren’t suitable for their growing bodies.
- Toddlers don’t need vitamin & mineral supplements unless prescribed by a doctor.

**Thirst Quenchers**

Toddlers need plenty to drink, especially on hot days or when they’re active. If they don’t drink enough they can become dehydrated which can lead to constipation.

- Water is best - Keep a jug handy in the fridge.
- Milk - Once a toddler is 12 months old they can drink full-fat cows’ milk or a toddler milk as their main milk drink. Two cups (500-600mL) a day is enough for most toddlers. Milk is an important source of calcium, fat-soluble vitamins and protein, but it’s not a good source of iron (unless you use a toddler milk which is enriched with iron). Be careful not to offer too much milk as it can spoil their appetite for other foods.
- Offer milk or water after or in-between meals so toddlers won’t get too full to eat their food.

**My child won’t drink milk! Don’t stress - you can’t make your child drink milk. Instead, offer 2 or 3 servings of other dairy foods each day e.g. yoghurt, cheese or custard.**

**Too high in sugar! Avoid offering fruit drinks, cordial or fizzy drinks - they’re high in sugar that can cause tooth decay & full of empty calories. Fruit juices are also high in natural sugar. If given, only offer very occasionally and dilute one part juice to ten parts water.**

**Don’t offer tea, coffee and alcohol – these drinks are not suitable for toddlers & children and can be harmful to their health.**

**Is your toddler still drinking milk from a bottle? If so, aim to get them drinking milk from a cup by around 18 months (or earlier). Toddlers often drink less from a cup, which means they don’t fill up on too much milk & spoil their appetite for food.**

For more ideas about feeding toddlers, visit Forbaby.co.nz or call our health professionals on the Forbaby Careline 0800 55 66 66.