

young families

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Understanding Your Toddler

The second and third years of your child's life are filled with nonstop exploration and learning. Between the ages of 12 and 36 months, even the most ordinary occurrence becomes a rich source of information. Every little thing that children see or do teaches them a little more about who they are and how they should respond to the world around them. Each new accomplishment, from the hugs you exchange to the successful use of the potty, is a significant demonstration of this learning process.

During the first year of infancy, you watched your baby emerge from a state of total helplessness. Ever so slowly, your infant began to gain control of his (or her) body. Before long, your baby sat up and began to take notice. By the thirteenth month, most (but not all) children will have accomplished a very important achievement: taking at least a few independent steps. This ability to walk alone, together with progress in mental development, has made your child more aware of having a separate body and of being a separate person. This awareness is a necessary base for the future healthy growth of your child's personality.

As they become more mobile, toddlers have more opportunities to investigate and begin to understand their relation to their surroundings and to other people. In the second year, probably the most visible form of this growth process is imitation. Imitation is an essential factor for children in everything from learning to talk to turning the pages of a book. After continuous observation of others' behavior, a toddler now has some of the flexibility needed to mimic this behavior. Imitation plays a major role in your child's attempts to be self-reliant in activities such as eating and dressing. Your encouragement can help overcome the child's frustration should these attempts fail.

If there's one thing bigger about toddlers than about adults, it's the force of their feelings. For the next year or so, your baby will probably *feel* more intensely than ever again. Anger, fear, willfulness, and defiance will occasionally erupt, to your great distress. But cheer up! This happens in the best of families; it's a passing phase and will eventually subside. During the second and third years, your little explorer's curiosity and delight will be at a high peak. So don't be surprised to encounter bellows and kicks and punches when you try to curtail some of your child's actions. Your toddler sees any interference as unwarranted opposition, and will express feelings of helplessness and frustration by exploding with atomic-like violence. It takes time to learn what is and is not acceptable in this adult-ruled world with its endless NOs and DON'Ts and STOPS. So be patient with your baby's moods.

It's also important to be patient with your child's progress. A toddler can't learn without making some mistakes — and

your toddler is trying to learn a great many things at once. By all means, guide your child and provide plenty of reassurance and encouragement. But keep in mind that children need to move ahead at their own pace. As your child attempts such feats as climbing stairs or drinking from a cup, resist the urge to *always* lend a hand. Your help is needed only if there is danger or if your child signals you for assistance. The independent efforts your youngster makes will add greater meaning to the final accomplishment.

Remember, too, that you have enough to cope with without the unnecessary anxiety of comparing your child's progress with that of anyone else. Children do not develop according to rigid psychological stages. The milestones outlined in pediatricians' developmental charts or in writings by child psychologists are meant only as general guides. There is plenty of room for normal, healthy variation. If you feel your child is lagging considerably behind, don't hesitate to consult your pediatrician. But if there's just a slight delay, for instance, if your youngster walks at 15 months rather than 12 or 13, rest assured that that is still normal.

Too often we reflect our own hurry, our own tension, in dealing with our children. We expect them to be responsible people before they are ready. We want them to be smart, to be polite, to get along with other children, to be cooperative and helpful. We want them to walk, talk, and grow up. These are all reasonable goals and they will eventually happen. But, remember, all of this takes TIME!

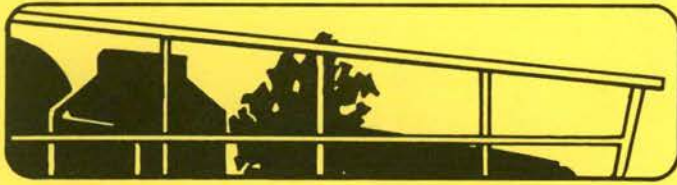
— Ronald Pitzer
Extension Specialist
Family Life

Toy Safety

Toys are for fun and learning. But they are also the cause of some 150,000 injuries a year — injuries serious enough to require hospital emergency room treatment. Here are some hints for preventing toy-related accidents.

- Check the instructions and explain to the child how to use the toy.
- Try to supervise children while they play. Learn to spot "an accident about to happen."
- Check toys periodically for broken parts and potential hazards. Repair dangerous toys immediately or throw them away. Sharp or splintered edges on wooden toys should be sanded smooth. Use only nontoxic paint on toys or toy boxes. Check outdoor toys for rust and weak or sharp parts that could become hazardous.
- Teach children to put their toys away so that toys do not get broken and so that no one trips and falls on them.
- Check toy boxes for safety, too. A toy chest should have a lightweight lid that can be opened easily from within. For extra safety, be sure there are ventilation holes. Watch for sharp edges that could cut and hinges that could pinch. Attach rubber bumpers to the front corners of a toy chest so little fingers won't be caught by a slammed lid.
- Be sure that toy shelves are sturdy and won't tip over if the child climbs on them.

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Dietary Guidelines

What should we eat to stay healthy? Newspapers, magazines, books, radio, and television give us a lot of advice on what foods we should or should not eat. Unfortunately, much of this advice is confusing and sometimes it is even contradictory.

To provide reliable information about nutrition, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has developed a set of seven dietary guidelines to help promote health and well-being.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans

1. Eat a variety of foods.
2. Maintain ideal weight.
3. Avoid too much fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.
4. Eat foods with adequate starch and fiber.
5. Avoid too much sugar.
6. Avoid too much sodium.
7. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation.

These guidelines are intended for people who are already healthy. They do not apply to people who need special diets because of diseases or conditions that interfere with normal nutrition. Such people may require special instruction from dietitians in consultation with their own doctors.

Guidelines alone cannot guarantee health or well-being. Many things besides diet can affect your health, including heredity, lifestyle, personality traits, mental health, and the environment. But good eating habits can help keep you healthy and even improve your health.

In future issues of *Young Families*, we'll examine the individual guidelines. We'll start here with the first one.

Dietary Guideline #1: Eat a Variety of Foods

You need about 40 different nutrients to stay healthy. Most foods contain more than one nutrient, but no single food item supplies all the essential nutrients in the amounts you need. Milk, for example, provides proteins, fats, sugars, B vitamins, Vitamin A, calcium, and phosphorus. But it contains very little iron or vitamin C. So it is important to eat a variety of foods to assure an adequate diet.

A good way to assure a well-balanced diet is to select a variety of foods each day from each of these major groups:

- fruits
- vegetables
- whole grain and enriched breads, cereals, and grain products
- milk, cheese, and yogurt
- meats, poultry, fish, eggs
- legumes (dry peas and beans)

Infants have special nutritional needs. Healthy full-term infants should be breastfed unless there are special problems. Most babies do not need solid foods until they are 3 to 6 months old. Prolonged breast or bottlefeeding without solid foods can result in iron deficiency. Do not add salt or sugar to baby's food. The foods themselves contain enough salt and sugar.

— Joanne Slavin
Extension Nutritionist

Buying Children's Shoes

It is important to shop carefully for children's shoes because their feet are soft and pliable and growing at a rapid rate. Make sure the shoes are well constructed and that they fit properly. Improperly fitted shoes can hinder a child's normal growth and comfort.

According to the American Foot Care Institute, the average size of children's feet changes about every 1-2 months for ages 1 to 6, every 2-3 months for ages 6 to 10, every 3-4 months for ages 10-12, every 4-5 months for ages 12 to 15, and every 6 months or more for ages 15 and over.

Check the following construction features:

- Material — firm but pliable; should breathe.
- Heels — sturdy; absorb sound and shock.
- Heel counter — firm; springs back after being pressed down; holds heel in place.
- Shank — firm but flexible; supports arch.
- Lining — smooth; covered seams; no rough edges; absorbs perspiration.
- Welt — holds upper to sole; helps make shoe waterproof.
- Finish — no raw edges or bulky stitching; no exposed tacks.
- Sole — firm but flexible; rough surface for toddlers.
- Stitching — close, even; strong thread.
- Last — straight shape with top of shoe lined up with sole.
- Label — must list materials used.

Socks should always be worn when trying on shoes. Check the following features to make sure the shoes fit:

- Length — $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch longer than longest toe. Test: press down with thumb.
- Width — room for toes in natural position; widest part of foot is at widest part of shoe. Test: pinch a crease.
- Toe height — toe box deep, high, and wide enough; should not touch toes.
- Length from heel to ball — ball is widest part of foot; ball of foot and arch base of shoe should meet.
- Shank — narrow part of shoe in front of heel; no excess puckers or wrinkles when walking.
- Instep — no pulling or straining at top of shoe. Test: bend foot; check for gape at instep area.
- Heel — snug; no gaping; should not cut into heel or rub on ankle bone.
- Sole — flexible.

— Sherri Johnson
Extension Specialist
Textiles and Clothing

This Issue

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