



the
Chickasaw
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Department of Health

**TODDLER'S
FUTURE**

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**BUILDING HEALTHY HABITS FOR
YOUR TODDLER'S FUTURE**

IDEAS

As your child grows, the first few years are a critical time to establish healthy habits that will shape their future well-being. Here are a few things to expect to expect with physical growth and development, and how you can help your toddler get on the right path to a healthy future.

BABY WEIGHT: GROWTH IS UNIQUE

- Babies naturally carry extra weight in their first year to support growth.
- By the time they are around 12 months, many children start losing some baby fat as they begin walking and becoming more active.

TRANSITION FROM WHOLE MILK: AFTER AGE 2

- After the age of 2 years, your toddler no longer needs whole milk. It is time to switch to low-fat or nonfat milk, which provides the necessary nutrients without too much saturated fat.
- If your child is reluctant to give up whole milk, you can try gradually reducing the amount of whole milk they drink by offering smaller portions or mixing it with low-fat or nonfat milk. For children with a dairy allergy or milk intolerance, plant-based alternatives like soy milk can be a good option, as it provides similar nutritional benefits to cow's milk.

SUGAR IN JUICE: LIMIT THE SWEET STUFF

- Juice often contains a lot of added sugar, which can contribute to unhealthy weight gain and dental issues.
- Limit juice intake to no more than 4 ounces a day for 2-3 year-olds and no more than 4-6 ounces for 4-5 year-old. Make sure it's 100% fruit juice.
- Offer whole fruits instead of juice for added fiber and nutrients, which help your toddler stay full and energized throughout the day.

START HEALTHY HABITS NOW: ACTIVITY IS KEY

- Active play supports healthy growth and development, so start early!
- Go for walks, play in the park or try simple games like throwing a ball or dancing to music. These activities not only build physical strength but also help with coordination and motor skills.
- Encourage outdoor play whenever possible, as it allows your toddler to explore and develop social skills while benefiting from fresh air and natural light.

IT IS OK TO PLAY WITH FOOD!

- Toddlers are naturally curious, and exploring food with their hands is a normal part of their development. In fact, it helps them become familiar with different textures, colors and tastes.
- Food play is not only fun but can encourage a positive relationship with food and help your toddler feel more comfortable trying new things.
- It often takes multiple exposures (sometimes up to 10-15 times) before a child is willing to try a new food. So, do not be discouraged if your toddler is not immediately excited about a new food. Keep offering it in different ways!
 - Try presenting foods in fun shapes, colorful options or even mixed into their favorite meals.
 - Offer choices so your toddler feels in control of what they eat. For example, "Would you like apple slices or carrots with your lunch?"

ENCOURAGING ACTIVITY: MAKE IT FUN

- Keep physical activity fun and interactive! Toddlers learn best through play, so try activities like:
 - Climbing (playground or safe spaces)
 - Dancing to favorite songs
 - Pushing or pulling toys around the yard
 - Running or jumping games
- The goal is to make moving fun, not a chore and to foster a love for being active from an early age.

ENCOURAGING ACTIVITY: MAKE IT FUN

- Growth is a gradual process, and all children develop at their own rate. Celebrate your child's milestones, whether it is a new step in walking or trying a new food.
- If you ever have concerns about your child's growth or development, don't hesitate to consult with your pediatrician for personalized advice and support.

Start now, set healthy habits, and watch your toddler thrive for years to come!