

# Developmental Expectations: Feeding

## What is expected for a toddler during meals?

### Schedule and Structure

- Able to sit at the table or dining surface for 15-30 minutes
- Eats every 2-3 hours with water in between mealtimes
- Demonstrates interest in a new food when presented
- Able to participate in meals without rewards or pressure

### Diet Variety

- Has at least 10 different foods in each category of fruit/vegetable, grains, and protein in their repertoire
- Accepts a wide variety of textures
- Able to eat a wide variety of brands of foods and from different stores and restaurants

### Self-Feeding

- Able to drink from an open cup and/or straw cup with minimal spillage
- By 2 years old, able to feed self with a spoon with some spillage of “sticky” textures such as yogurt, mashed potatoes, cottage cheese, etc.
- By 3 years old, able to pierce soft food with a fork and bring to mouth with some spillage
- By 4 years old, able to help with light meal preparation
- By 5 years old, able to feed self a variety of different textures with a fork and spoon with ease and very minimal spillage

## Picky Eating is a Typical Phase!

At this age, our children experience a developmental burst regarding movement, social emotional development, and independence. Children at this age are often seen testing boundaries to understand what they can and cannot control in their world. With these rapid developmental advancements, a phase of picky eating is typical, emerging around 12-18 months and persisting until 3 years. Despite this being a typical phase, the following are a few identifiers for picky eating being more than “just a phase”:

- Tantrums, throwing food, or stating “I don’t like it!” when presented with a food
- Strong preferences for specific brands or foods from certain packages
- Diet repertoire of less than 20-30 foods
- Avoiding different textures or colors of foods
- Needing bribes, distractions, or coercions to eat or stay at the table
- Requiring a separate meal from the rest of the family (not due to allergies)

For more information or to have your child evaluated, please contact McKibben and Monte Pediatric Therapy at [info@mckibbenandmonte.com](mailto:info@mckibbenandmonte.com)