

## **BABY ADVOCATE**

### **At 15 months**

#### **Health**

My toddler won't let me feed him anymore, and most of the food he feeds himself lands on the floor. What should I do to make sure he eats enough?

- It is wonderful that you are allowing your child to feed himself. It is also important to realize he might explore his food by mashing or even throwing it. A plastic tablecloth under his high chair will help make clean up easier. First, start by giving him small amounts of food at a time so he can get it to his mouth and not play. If he gets to the point where playing with the food is more important than eating it, then consider his mealtime done, and remove him and the food until the next snack or meal time. He will get hungry and eventually will learn to eat the food when it is offered. Remember that your toddler is extremely sensitive to your reactions to feedings, so remain calm and be consistent. Check with your medical provider at well child visits to be sure your child is following his growth curve.

My toddler is constantly falling and bumping her head. I'm so afraid she's going to get hurt as she becomes more independent. What can I do to keep her safe?

- Toddlers are unsteady as they learn to walk, and it is normal for them to constantly fall and bump their heads. You should notice that the more your child falls, the better she becomes at folding her body and falling well. You should make sure that your toddler can practice moving on a soft surface, but you do not have to rush to catch her. It is very important at this age to make sure you have a baby-proofed environment for her to explore her world safely. If your toddler doesn't cry right away after a fall, is knocked unconscious, or seems lethargic, it could be a sign of a concussion and you should contact your doctor's office immediately.

I know that my child needs shots, but now that he's older, won't he remember them now and be too frightened of shots in the future?

- Shots do become an unwelcome part of a doctor's visit, but by being truthful with him, you can show your toddler that both you and the doctor will comfort him when he is hurting. Tell your toddler that you know it will hurt, but not for long. If possible, hold him tight during the shot, and offer a good hug and reward right after. The memory of a painful shot should be not as significant as the memory of a kind doctor, a parent that protects, and a small reward. Remember not to use shots as a consequence of poor behavior.

My toddler still screams for a bottle at night. She won't stop crying until I give her a bottle. Is this okay?

- The nighttime bottles are usually the hardest to give up, and it is up to the family to decide when that time is best for the child. There are many different opinions about when and how a baby should be weaned. In considering how you will do it, it is important to ask yourself, "What does this nighttime bottle mean to my toddler? How can I comfort her in other ways besides giving her the bottle?" If you decide that it is time for her to give up the nighttime bottle, then you need to do so gently and consistently. When she screams for the bottle, comfort her, but then encourage her to go to sleep. It might be difficult for a few nights, but soon toddlers realize that their screaming will not produce a bottle and they will quickly move on. To avoid tooth decay and ear infections, children should never fall asleep with a bottle.

## Development

My toddler hides behind me when someone approaches her. Does this mean she will always be shy?

- Toddlers often withdraw from strangers because they now have fears developed from complex thoughts and have developed trust with certain caregivers to keep them safe. With the proper support, most toddlers grow out of this phase. Be patient and don't force your child to interact with adults. You can comfort her by holding her hand and reassuring her that she is safe. You also might want to encourage others to "take it slow" in approaching your child. As your toddler's fears are normal, it is important not to tease her or attach a personality trait such as "shy" to her.

My toddler is now having tantrums when he doesn't get his way. I don't mind when he does it at home, but I don't like it in public places. What should I do?

- Tantrums are a normal part of the life of a toddler and occur because he is developing intense feelings and doesn't know a better way to communicate them. While you respect that and allow him to tantrum at home (while remaining present and calm), being in public is a more difficult situation. Often, public places can be over-stimulating to a toddler and bring up many anxious feelings and fears. The best way to avoid tantrums in public is to make sure that your toddler does not become overly frustrated, anxious, hungry, or tired. If one does occur and your child cannot be distracted, it is best to abandon your plans and remove your child from the situation. Your flexibility during this time will be important to teach your child that you are consistent and will not give in, regardless of the place. This is also an important age to make sure that you are only saying "no" to the non-negotiable, and that you pick your battles—don't be afraid to accommodate the small things both at home and in public.

Is my child too young to be put in time out?

- At this age, it is important to teach your child about limits. Toddlers actually feel more secure when they have consistent limits set and discipline saved for important matters. Most of the time at this age, you can move your child away from the problem, give him a moment to collect himself, and distract him with another toy or activity. It is important to be patient as your toddler is still not able to put your "no" as a higher priority than his desire to explore his world. Instead of putting him in a structured time out at this age, it is most important that you guide him in the process of discovering what no means. As he gets older, he can be placed in a spot separated from the action for the number of minutes equal to his age but not before he is two years old.

My child is walking by holding on to furniture, but not walking by herself. Should I be worried?

- It is important that you express your worries to your doctor and that you look at how her movement abilities connect with her overall development. While most toddlers are taking steps independently at this age, some might wait a little longer. Make sure that your toddler is getting enough practice walking. You can help her by letting her practice on level, smooth surfaces that are clear of obstacles. You can encourage her to walk to you or another object that she wants by placing it just beyond her reach. As she learns to take steps, gradually increase the distance and allow her to take more. Children of this age love to push things, so give her opportunities to walk with a toy shopping cart or lawn mower in front of her. If your child doesn't start taking independent steps soon, contact your doctor for further evaluation.

When I try to read to my toddler, he won't sit still. What should I do?

- Reading to toddlers each day is very important for language development. Most toddlers only sit for a few minutes, so it is important to adjust your expectations of story time to one that is brief and active. Have fun with your toddler and allow him to turn the pages of the book, point to things you name, and answer (or ask) questions about the story. You can also try letting your toddler hold one board book while you read from another. Remember that you don't have to read all the words to tell the story. Toddlers love it when you make up voices and use your body to tell the story.

My toddler bites his brother and other children. What should I do?

- Biting is a normal reaction for toddlers that are frustrated and can't let you know what they want. They also might bite out of curiosity, boredom, or teething pain. It is important for you to understand his reasons for the biting behavior. You (or his caregiver) should immediately separate him from the child he bit and give comfort to the bitten child. Then, turn your comfort and calm attention to your child and say something like, "Biting hurts. You hurt your brother." If he bit out of frustration, you should give him the words about his feelings such as, "you were mad at your brother for taking your toy." Then, give him another way to let out his feelings like pounding a pillow. It is important to remain calm and consistent each time your child bites. By giving attention to the victim and giving words to the biter, your child will realize that there are better ways to get what he wants.

## **Prevention**

My toddler refuses to stay in a car seat now. He even knows how to unbuckle himself. What should I do?

- This is a safety issue that you have to be firm about. First, set the example that everyone in your car buckles up and stays buckled before the car starts. If he unbuckles himself, you need to pull over immediately and buckle him back in. Make sure that he has things to do in the car like listening to kid's music, coloring in a book, or eating a small snack. You must be firm about the expectation and the consequences (even stopping the car safely for a time-out), but also give him things to make the car trip exciting so he can get his mind off of escaping.

Is it too soon to bring my child bike riding with me, as long as she wears a bike helmet?

- The American Academy of Pediatrics states, "You should be aware that even with the best carrier and safety helmet, your child is at risk for serious injury. This can occur when you lose control on an uneven road surface, or if you should happen to strike or be struck by another vehicle. It is wiser to wait to enjoy bicycling together until your child is old enough to ride with you on her own two-wheeler. If you're considering having your child ride as a passenger in a rear-mounted seat on an adult bike keep in mind that not only will she make the bike unstable, but she also will increase the braking time and raise the risk of serious injury to both you and your youngster. A much better choice is for your child to ride in a bicycle-towed child trailer. Never carry infants in backpacks or front packs on a bike."

I've had my house child-proofed for many months, but now that she is more independent, should I do other things to keep her safe?

- It is wonderful that your toddler has a childproofed environment to explore. Now that your child is mobile, you will want to re-check and make sure that your child is protected from the stairs and unsafe areas by a sturdy gate. You will also want to re-test the stability of tall pieces of furniture and lamps to make sure they cannot be pulled over. Make sure that electronic cords and computers are out of your toddler's reach. Cords for blinds and drapes should be floor mounted or loops should be cut. Remind all in your family to never leave plastic bags or small objects lying around the house.