

Feeding Picky Toddlers with Down Syndrome

Toddlers have small bellies and growing bodies. They also have a budding sense of independence. As a parent, this can be both delightful and exhausting, especially at mealtime! This handout gives helpful tips to feed your toddler.

WHAT IS NORMAL BEHAVIOR WHILE MY SON/DAUGHTER IS TRYING NEW FOOD?

- **Playing with or spitting out food**
- **Making faces or grimacing.** Toddlers often make faces when trying new foods. This means they are learning about a new taste or texture. It does not mean they do not like the food.
- **Feeling more or less hungry at different times.** Toddlers' hunger may not yet follow meal times. It is normal for a toddler to refuse a meal.

WHEN SHOULD I SEEK HELP ABOUT MY SON/DAUGHTER'S FEEDING BEHAVIOR?

- If he/she does not try or like an entire food group or texture for more than 2-3 weeks
- If he/she eats fewer than 20 different foods
- If your child cries, fusses or screams often during mealtime.
- If he/she persistently gags when eating foods.
- If he/she shows signs of a food allergy, like a rash, diarrhea or **anaphylaxis** (when the throat swells and closes after eating a certain food)

WHO CAN I CALL WITH QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

- **Your son/daughter's doctor.** He/she can answer questions about feeding behaviors or help if you notice symptoms like coughing often while drinking.
- **A feeding therapist or a registered dietitian.** You can schedule an appointment in the Down Syndrome Program by calling 617-643-8912. You can also search online for a local registered dietitian at www.eatright.org.

Helpful Tips

- **Let your son/daughter explore new foods and textures.** Let him/her touch, smell and taste a new food before trying it.
- **Be patient, loving and consistent.** Children who have Down syndrome might take a little longer to try new foods. This is normal.
- **Stay neutral.** This means not reacting or overreacting if your toddler becomes fussy or refuses a new food.
- **Eat together without distractions.** Set a good example by eating together as often as possible. Turn off the TV and put away cell phones.
- **Pair a favorite food with a new food.** Offer the new food as a side dish. For example, if your son/daughter likes pasta, offer a side of broccoli. If he/she likes peas, offer carrots on the side.
- **Offer healthy foods over and over.** These include fruit, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins. It can take some time for your son/daughter to get used to the new textures, flavors and temperatures.
- **Add a dip!** Dipping can be fun. Offer a side of hummus, dressing, guacamole or nut butter for him/her to dip new foods in.
- **Try, try and try again.** It can take more than 10 times for your son/daughter to try a new food and even longer to like it. It can take some time for him/her to get used to the new textures, flavors and temperatures.