



## **DIET EXERCISE AND NUTRITION FOR TODDLERS**

### ***Practical Tips for Parents from Allen O'Donoghue of CA Coaching***

It is never too early for you to get your kids into a healthy lifestyle. Toddlers have a lot of energy and as a parent, it is your role to help ensure they use up that energy every day. Some tips for raising a healthy, happy toddler:

- The earlier you introduce fruit and vegetables into their daily routine the less likely you are to have a fussy eater. Don't pass on your own food prejudices onto your kids – encourage them to taste everything and try everything. And remember just because they don't like the taste of things at two years of age doesn't mean they won't like it when they are three or four or five.
- Of course kids should have a sweet treat, but remember they should be just that, a treat. Sweets, chocolate and bars should not be a daily occurrence, especially for toddlers. Treats can just as easily be fresh fruit, raisins or fruit yoghurts (that are low in sugar). You can teach your toddler what a treat is, and that doesn't always have to be a sugary treat.
- Good behaviour should be rewarded with positive reinforcement and not sweet treats. If you are doing a star chart with your child, the end reward should be an activity together – something fun that you will do together and that you will both enjoy.
- Know what your child is eating. If you are buying processed foods for your toddler know what the ingredients are. Many processed foods are high in sugar, salt or saturated fats – none of these are good for young children.
- Make a trip to the supermarket an adventure – think about the fruit and vegetable aisle from the perspective of a toddler. All those colours and shapes will be attractive to them. Talk to them about food and bring home something new to try every week. As long as a child is in a buggy or trolley you can also avoid the sweets aisle – remember they learn pester power at a very early age.
- Involve your kids in cooking. Help them to understand that time spent cooking helps to create yummy food that they will enjoy.
- If they don't like the texture of fruit or vegetables then make your own sauces. Load them full of fresh fruit and vegetables and whizz them up to a smooth consistency that you can put on pasta or with chicken or potatoes.
- Get them used to exercise – a lively trip the playground, kicking a football in the garden, playing chasing. On a wet day run races up and down the corridor or play chasing around the couch. Teach them to swim, dance or other activities that involve jumping around and being active. Kids who are active have better concentration and sleep better at night because both their bodies and their brains are tired.
- If your child is an only child, set up play dates with other kids. This will encourage them to try new things, to play new games and to learn how to share and interact with others. This is a very important lesson for when they go to school. It is also very important for you as a parent to get out and spend time with other adults and break the cycle of being stuck at home.
- And finally, both kids and clothes are washable. Allow your kids to get dirty when they are playing. Put on their wellies and let them jump in puddles (wait until you hear them laughing).

#### **Exercise for Parents:**

It is also important for your children to see you exercise (or to know that you make time to exercise). If they exercise as kids and they see you enjoying and making time for exercise as an adult, they will learn that it is part of a lifelong habit. They will also learn that you even though you might go away from them briefly, that you will return and that helps them to cope with anxiety around separation.

As a parent, making time for regular exercise gives you time for yourself. It helps to clear your head. It helps you to de-stress. It releases endorphins – the happy hormones. And it keeps you fit and healthy. A great result!

*These Positive Parenting Tips are brought to you by Allen O'Donoghue of CA Coaching.  
Allen is a specialist in parenting and family development and runs a series of Positive Parenting Skills courses each year.  
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