

TIP SHEET

Mealtime Solutions for Your Baby, Toddler, and Preschooler by Ann Douglas

Looking for ways to encourage healthy eating and sidestep “food fights” with your baby, toddler, and preschooler? Here are some solutions drawn from *Mealtime Solutions for Your Baby, Toddler, and Preschooler: The Ultimate No-Worry Approach for Each Age and Stage* (Wiley, 2006).

Problem	Solution
“Everyone is giving me different advice about when to start my baby on solid foods and what foods to start with.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start solids around age 6 months. Choose an iron-rich first food (iron-fortified infant cereal is the first food chosen by most parents, but there are other options, like serving your baby meats, poultry, fish, tofu, beans and other legumes, and egg yolks). • Wait a couple of days before introducing each additional food. This way, if your baby shows signs of a food intolerance or allergy, you’ll be able to pinpoint the source of the problem more easily. • Consider making your own baby food, both for financial reasons and to make it easier for your baby to adjust to your family’s diet.
“My baby is having a hard time figuring out how to use her sippy cup.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take the valve out of the sippy cup until she gets the hang of using a sippy cup. • Try a plastic cup with a built-in straw. • Stick with water as much as possible, both to minimize the mess to avoid dental problems and “toddler diarrhea.” (Treat juice as a breakfast drink exclusively and you won’t have a problem.)
“My toddler just picks as his food.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toddlers grow at a much slower rate than babies. This is why toddlers have less of an appetite than babies. • Toddler food portions are only ¼ to 1/3 the size of an adult-sized portion. • Some toddlers fill up on juice, milk, and other liquids. Ditto for snacks. (Snacks should be mini-meals.) • Let your toddler decide how much to eat. Most healthy children won’t starve themselves. However, there are situations when children can run into trouble, so it’s best to have your child checked by a doctor if you’re seriously concerned. • Keep a food diary for about a week, taking note of everything that your toddler eats. This will provide a much more accurate idea of what she is—or isn’t—eating than if you were to track her intake for a single day. Use a digital camera to make the job easier.

<p>“We can’t get our toddler to stay at the dinner table once she’s finished eating.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept the fact that your days of leisurely wining and dining are over for now. (You’re in the whining and dining phase now!) • Keep your child engaged in the mealtime conversation rather than trying to carry on a one-on-one conversation with your spouse. She’ll be entertained longer that way. • Teach your child that she can’t get up and down from the dinner table like a yoyo. • Excuse your toddler when she’s sure she’s finished eating, but let her know that she won’t be getting her dinner plate back. She’ll have to wait for her bedtime snack if she decides she’s still hungry.
<p>“My child isn’t hungry first thing in the morning, so he doesn’t like to eat breakfast.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get your child up a little earlier so he has a bit more time to wake up. • Watch the size of your child’s bedtime snack. That could be curbing his morning appetite. • Serve a quick-and-easy breakfast: e.g., a small serving of cereal with milk or a serving of yogurt.
<p>“My child dawdles over her breakfast every morning.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factor dawdle time into your morning schedule. • Let an egg timer or travel alarm clock keep track of the time instead of you. • Plan your routine so that you can be doing other things while your child is finishing her breakfast. (Note: Never leave a young child unsupervised, due to the risk of choking.)
<p>“My child wants to eat all kinds of sugary treats for breakfast.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have some family rules about which foods are a no-go at breakfast time—like ice cream—and then stick to those rules. • Encourage your preschooler to suggest healthy breakfast foods that he’d like you to purchase at the grocery store—e.g., his favorite brand of unsweetened cereal. • Look for foods that have strong kid-appeal and yet that still deliver the goods nutritionally: e.g., fresh berries on cereal or whole grain waffles.
<p>“My child complains that her lunch “tastes yucky” by the time lunchtime rolls around.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pack your child’s lunch with a frozen food pack so that her lunch stays cool and fresh as long as possible. • Choose foods that survive well in a lunch bag. Steer clear of fruits that are easily bruised and vegetables that wilt in a matter of minutes. Appearance is a big deal to most kids. • Invest in a well-designed lunch bag that features a lot of padding and insulation.
<p>“We end up eating takeout or</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know what you’re making ahead of time. Sometimes the toughest part is coming up with the idea <i>du jour</i>—

<p>convenience foods more often than we'd like, simply because we're too exhausted to cook."</p>	<p>and ensuring that you have the right combinations of ingredients on hand.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Load up on cookbooks that feature menus that can be whipped up quickly and easily, and that are both healthy and kid-friendly. • Do some food preparation ahead of time or look for items in the grocery store that can save you time on the food preparation front (e.g., salad in a bag, mini-carrots, etc.). • Make at least one extra meal on the weekends, either by cooking that meal all by itself and popping in the freezer, or by making "doubles" of one of your family's weekend meals (e.g., a double batch of spaghetti sauce or lasagna) so that you can have leftovers during the week. • Look for ways to join forces with other families on the mealtime preparation front. Consider meal swaps, supper clubs, cooking coops, and other ways of cooking smarter and freeing up more time in your schedule so that you'll have more time for fun and relaxation.
<p>"It's hard to find a dinner that the whole family likes."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead of trying to play short-order cook, think about creating variations of the same meal. For example, if you're having spaghetti, you could serve the noodles, sauce, meat, and vegetables separately so that kids who only like certain parts of the meal (or who don't like the different parts of the meal to touch each other!) could come up with an acceptable meal alternative. • Don't be too rigid—but don't be too lax, too. Define your boundaries when it comes to making "alternative meals" (or allowing kids to make their own alternative meals), and then stick to them. • If you allow the kids to make an alternative meal, require that they state their intention early. You may want to have a rule that there's no bailing from the dinner choice <i>du jour</i> once Mom or Dad has started making dinner. It's not fair to the cook!
<p>"My child hates milk."</p>	<p>Consider one of these possible solutions (assuming your child isn't allergic to milk):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whip up a smoothie; • serve chocolate or strawberry-flavored milk; • serve other beverages that are fortified with calcium and vitamin D; • add milk to foods: soups, casseroles, mashed potatoes, on top of fruit, etc.
<p>"My child is a picky</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay relaxed about the issue. If you're clear about your

eater. He hates everything.”	job (providing healthy food) and you’re child’s job (deciding whether or not to eat, you’re not likely to feel quite as stressed. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don’t allow the situation to escalate into a power-struggle over food. It’s a lose-lose proposition for you.• If you’re concerned that your child isn’t getting enough to eat (or eating a wide enough variety of foods), consult with a dietitian or other healthcare provider who specializes in pediatric nutrition. (Call your doctor or your local public health unit or health department for referrals.)
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Ann Douglas is the author of *Sleep Solutions for Your Baby, Toddler, and Preschooler* and *Mealtime Solutions for Your Baby, Toddler, and Preschooler* as well as the bestselling titles in The Mother of All® books series. Visit Ann online at www.motherofallblogs.com and www.having-a-baby.com.