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## 5 Ways to Improve a Toddler's Nutrition

By Theresa Tsigis, D.C. M.S.

*As a child my family's menu consisted of two choices: take it or leave it. ~Buddy Hackett*

In the last issue, we covered staying healthy in later years; let's begin at the beginning now. Here are 5 common challenges facing parents regarding the nutrition of toddlers, and strategies for handling them:

- 1) Food Fussiness
- 2) Food Allergies
- 3) Colic & other Digestive problems
- 4) Eczema, Asthma, or Ear Infections
- 5) Refined carbohydrate cravings

1). Food Fussiness - Almost every preschooler has food preferences, to the exclusion of other foods. I remember my 3year old son shouting in a health food store, "I don't like healthy foods, I like junky foods!" While a funny memory, a toddler's food stubbornness may lack entertainment value in the moment.

Surprisingly, the best approach besides patience is that old Boy Scout adage "Be Prepared." Planning a healthy variety of foods for the entire family - and presenting them creatively - will intrigue many a tot with the process. You may find your little one monopolizing the guacamole, artichokes, and asparagus. And if not, be assured that as they grow, toddlers expand their repertoire. One psychology approach that still works with my youngest is, "Taste this today, even if you don't think you like it- your taste buds are growing just like you are growing into a big boy."

2). Food Allergies - This issue increasingly pertains to a young child's health. For some, the prevention reaches back to pregnancy. The mother's own internal health and allergy patterns may influence the future health of her offspring. Food reactions are mediated by different antibodies, and may be delayed or acute in nature. Life-threatening allergies, such as to peanuts, strawberries or shellfish, may grow over time - therefore monitoring any reactions (rash, itching, stomach pain, vomiting, wheezing) can be crucial. The most common allergies are to soy, wheat, eggs, dairy, peanuts, tree nuts, corn, shellfish, bananas, citrus, coffee, and chocolate. It's important for a woman to screen herself before the onset of pregnancy if digestive issues, asthma, eczema, or allergies exist in the family history. There are different aspects to allergenicity, and an experienced nutritionist or allergist can help. Another useful strategy with infants is the avoidance of common allergens during the first 1 to 2 years of life. With toddlers, trial food eliminations can be instrumental in recovery from delayed reaction allergies. Many recover quickly compared to adults, and may resume a varied diet.

3). Colic and other Digestive Problems - Food allergies, poor levels of beneficial intestinal bacteria, yeast, pathogenic bacterial overgrowth or parasites (which can be passed on early in life via the mother's digestive tract), lactose or gluten intolerance, leaky gut syndrome, stress, inability to digest certain carbohydrates, proteins, or fats, are possible causes of digestive irregularities. Breastfeeding for the first year of life offers a protective influence. Lab tests can reveal the underlying mechanisms, but often trial food eliminations and other techniques can remove the offending cause. The digestive system is currently

being referred to as "the 2nd brain," so it is worth paying attention to!

4). Eczema, Asthma, or Ear Infections - There is often a familial component, but environment may either exacerbate or reduce the severity or incidence of episodes. If your toddler was given antibiotics for ear infections, they can cause digestive issues later on. The right type of probiotics can be beneficial after antibiotics - they repopulate the gut with friendly bacteria, which influence immune system health, intestinal repair, hormones, and food allergies; please discuss this with your nutritionist. Atopic disorders such as asthma and eczema often have underlying nutritional components.

5). Toddler Carbohydrate Cravings - Carbohydrates are not required for the maintenance of life, which comes as a surprise to many. The best approach is monitoring the amounts given and eaten, and offering variety. Unrefined carbohydrates found in vegetables, fruits, beans, peas, legumes, whole grain berries (brown rice, wheat, rye), seeds and nuts offer plenty of vitamins, minerals, fiber, and water. Vitamins and minerals act as co-enzymes necessary for most metabolic functions. It's best to receive those from whole foods; supplements should not be the sole source. Try leaving small bowls of cut-up carrots, celery, apples, oranges, grapes and seasonally available fruits and veggies in front of your toddler. Studies of adults reveal that visually available foods are eaten more often. Put that knowledge to use with your little person, and you may be pleasantly surprised to see them filling up on healthier foods. Another simple solution (for the whole family) is to not have junk food in the house.

Being a parent is an amazing and time-consuming endeavor. Following the counsel of an experienced nutritionist can help give a preschooler the edge and make the Terrible Two's the "Terrific Two's. At Lamorinda Nutrition we have over 20 years of experience working with families to promote health. With a variety of insurances currently accepted, there are affordable ways to keep children optimally nourished during their developmental years.

Dr. Theresa Tsingis, D.C., M.S. is in private practice at 89 Davis Rd., #180, Orinda, CA. Telephone (925) 254-1080.

Email: [drtsingis@comcast.net](mailto:drtsingis@comcast.net)

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

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