

West Plano Pediatrics
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Eighteen Month Check-up Advice
Next Visit: Two Years Old

Diet—Your child should be learning to use a cup and a spoon well, but will still use his fingers for a lot of foods. He will probably want to be in control of what he eats, and that's okay. Continue to offer him a variety of foods to provide a well-balanced diet over time. Don't worry if his eating habits seem strange to you. Toddlers tend to eat the foods they need, and you might be surprised at how well balanced his diet really is. At your appointment, we may check your child's hemoglobin level to assess adequate iron intake in his diet. There is a handout on iron-rich foods that may be found on the website.

Development --At eighteen months, your toddler is probably walking well and may be able to carry or pull a toy behind him as he walks. After he has been walking for about 6 months, you will start to notice a more mature, heel-to-toe walking pattern. He will continue to improve his balance by learning to run, kick a ball, climb, or stand on tiptoe. Make sure he has some time to develop his hand coordination by letting him scribble, turn pages and build with blocks. He will probably enjoy sorting or nesting toys, jigsaw puzzles with large pieces, dolls, trucks and anything that he can use in make believe play.

Your toddler's vocabulary will also be increasing. Most toddlers have about 50 words by the time they are 2 years old, but there is a wide range of normal. As he approaches his second birthday, he may begin to speak with more phrases or even short sentences. At this time it is important for you to be aware of your own language. Use the correct words for objects. For instance, say bottle instead of baba, toes instead of piggies. If your child has a difficult time pronouncing words, don't worry--encourage him and repeat the word correctly. Remember that a normal toddler's speech is only recognizable about half of the time.

At this age, your child is becoming aware of himself as an individual--he will think that he is the center of the universe. He may become very possessive of his toys, his parents, etc. Your child should have some play time each week with other children his age, but don't expect him to play well with them yet. Toddlers tend to grab their toys from the hands of others and even hit because they don't understand that other children have feelings. He will need constant adult supervision to teach him how to interact with other children.

You may notice that your child goes through a phase of increased dependence and clinginess around other people at this age. Some children choose a toy or blanket that they use to comfort them at bedtime or in times of stress. This is a normal phase and simply indicates his awareness of his individuality and some need for reassurance before he takes the next developmental step.

Toilet Training Readiness --Most parents are ready for toilet training around the second birthday, but many children are not. It is important not to force your child to toilet train before he is ready, so you should know some of the signs to look for.

1. He prefers clean, dry diapers and likes to be changed.
2. He can recognize that he has a full bladder or the urge to have a bowel movement.
3. He can briefly postpone urinating or having a bowel movement. You may notice that he goes away for a minute, then comes back wet. He will begin to wake up from naps with a dry diaper.
4. He will also need to know the words and be familiar with the equipment needed for potty training. This is the step that you can help with--begin teaching him about “pee” or “poop” or “wet” or “messy” diapers. Let him watch you or a sibling use the toilet. Give him a practice run by letting him sit on the potty while he still has his diaper on.
5. He will want to please his parents and feel the satisfaction of learning to use the potty. This one may be difficult if your child is going through a very negative phase. Try to make the potty one of his most cherished possessions and praise him a lot when he shows any interest in the potty chair.

As a parent, your job is to provide the words and the equipment and to recognize the signs that your child is ready to toilet train. If you present toilet training in a positive way and use praise and enthusiasm, you will be more successful than if you punish your child or show disapproval when he has accidents.

Discipline—It is your job as a parent to set clear and consistent limits for your child. Unfortunately, it is your toddler’s job to test those limits. He is learning to be independent but he needs your help to learn what behavior is acceptable. He will feel more secure if you give him some boundaries. At 18 months, redirection is still the primary way to let him know his limits. Tell him “no” and move him to a task that is more acceptable.

If you find that you need another form of discipline, you may introduce the concept of time-out at this age. Tell him that he is going into time-out and why. Put him in a quiet place to cool off and reflect on what he has done wrong. He shouldn’t be allowed any toys, TV, etc. A good rule of thumb is one minute of time-out for each year of age—an 18 month old would get 1 ½ minutes of time out. Use a kitchen timer to keep track of time. Your toddler may be too young to understand, but starting early can help establish time-out as a form of discipline and it will certainly remove him from whatever situation is getting him into trouble. As your child gets older, time out will teach him to calm himself and develop more self-control. When you use time-out for a child who is 2 ½-3 years or older, the timer should not start until your child is quiet.

Keep in mind that you are developing a foundation for discipline for the future. If you establish control in the toddler years, you may have more luck in dealing with the teenage years!