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Fifteen Month Check-up Advice
Next Visit: Eighteen Months

Diet-- Most parents notice a change in their child's eating habits around 15-24 months of age. It may seem that your toddler couldn't possibly be getting enough to eat. She may be very active and seem "too busy to eat" or eat only short, quick meals. Many toddlers also enjoy throwing or playing with their food to see their parents' reactions. You may also notice that your toddler goes on "food jags"--she may want nothing but beets for a few days, then refuse to have them on her plate the next week.

Although this phase is distressing to many parents, don't worry too much if your child doesn't eat as many servings of fruits, vegetables or meats in one day as you would like. Your toddler will choose the foods she needs over time. Let her continue to learn to feed herself and explore new tastes and textures. Your job as her parent is to provide well rounded meals and snacks. It might help to let her think that the menu was her idea by offering her some limited choices. Never get into a fight with your child over food or force her to eat. **A parent has never won a feeding battle with a child.** If you are concerned that your child is not getting enough fruits and vegetables, consider giving her a multi-vitamin to get her through this stage. We will continue to monitor her growth over time--if she grows normally, she is getting plenty to eat. Your child should not be getting the majority of her calories from milk. 16-18 oz a day are plenty.

Development-- At 15 months, your child is probably walking or even running most of the time. She may enjoy scribbling with a crayon, imitating your actions and "helping" with household chores. She will learn to undress herself soon. Your toddler will probably need to learn how to play by herself before she is interested in playing with other children. Although your child has only a few words at this age, she understands about 10 times as many as she says. She will communicate with you through gestures while her vocabulary improves. Be sure that you talk and read to your baby a lot. This will help in the development of her language skills.

You may also notice that your baby is learning to be more independent, yet still needs reassurance and guidance from her parents. Learning to be independent is a "push-pull" process. She may "push" you away by refusing certain foods, insisting on her way, or even throwing a tantrum. When she feels uncomfortable in a new situation, she will still need your help to feel safe. It is up to you to decide which battles are worth fighting--for instance, sitting in the car seat and staying out of the street. Let her win the unimportant battles, such as which dress she wears or whether or not she eats one more pea.

Discipline-- While your child is learning to be more independent, it is important to have some clear and consistent limits. At fifteen months, your toddler will not be able to understand why you have rules--you will have to repeat yourself. Once you establish a rule, be sure that it is enforced every time and by **everyone**--parents, grandparents, etc.

Your toddler is probably too young for most forms of discipline. At this age, the most effective way to deal with a difficult situation may be to remove her or distract her from it. It is very important to praise your child when she is behaving appropriately. If possible, don't spend a lot of time reacting to unacceptable behavior--you might unintentionally encourage your child to continue. Don't ever hit your child in anger. Hitting is an ineffective form of discipline and it teaches lessons other than the one you want her to learn. Give her a firm "No" and redirect her attention to another task. If she persists, continue to redirect her each time or isolate briefly her in a play pen or crib.

Temper Tantrums-- As your child moves toward the "terrible twos", you might notice an increase in angry outbursts and temper tantrums. In general, tantrums are your child's way of letting you know that she has reached her limit and can no longer deal with the situation in an acceptable way. Toddlers usually can't tell you that they are mad or upset, but they can show you by acting out. You may notice that tantrums are more frequent at nap time, dinner time, in the supermarket or at family gatherings. One effective way to deal with tantrums is to anticipate stressful situations and avoid them or modify them so that your child can cope better. It may also help to give your child clear messages--don't let her think she has a choice. Instead of "Why don't we get ready for bed?", say "It's time for bed now." Be sure to follow through. It's very important to be consistent.

It may be impossible to avoid temper tantrums altogether, but dealing with them effectively can make them less likely to happen again. If your child is simply mad because she isn't getting her way, it is best to ignore tantrums. Make sure she is in a place where she can't hurt herself, then pretend she isn't there. If your child is frustrated and on "overload", it is okay to hold her while she calms down. Give her a hug and distract her attention elsewhere. If you are away from home, it is important to remove your child from the situation. You might need to go sit in the car while she cools off a little.

Some parents find it helpful to make a comment about what they see their child is feeling. Telling your child that she seems "mad" or "upset" will teach her a name for her emotions. As she learns to communicate better with words, her temper tantrums will become less frequent. It is a lot easier to give in when your child has a tantrum, but she needs to learn about limits and acceptable behavior. Don't give up!