

# 2½ Year Check Up

Well Child Appointments can be made online at [AustinRegionalClinic.com](http://AustinRegionalClinic.com).



## NUTRITION

During this period, your child's world expands to include friends and others in the community. However, **parents remain the greatest influence on children's development**, including eating habits. Establishing healthy eating behaviors during this time in your child's life is essential for lifelong health.

**Family meals** provide an opportunity for parents to model healthy eating behaviors for their children in a pleasant environment. Sit together as a family as often as possible. Plan the food your family eats using the MyPlate visual diagram, including all 5 food groups during meals and snacks. At age 2 your child grows less than they did their first year of life. This leads to less interest in food. Food refusals, food jags (liking a food one day and not the next) and picky eating are normal, and you are not alone! Many parents face these issues. As parents, our job is to provide nutritious food for our child. **Parents are responsible for what, when, and where the family eats. Your child's job is to decide how much to eat.**

Remember, toddlers have very short attention spans, so it is essential that expectations for mealtime behavior not exceed their attention span. You might try to have something that your toddler can start eating immediately, like their vegetable, as soon as they sit at the table. Family mealtimes **WILL BE** loud, messy, and fun as toddlers explore new tastes, textures, and smells of food.

Toddlers may need to get out of their chairs before others are finished eating or they may start throwing food out of boredom. Sitting in a parent's lap to finish their milk or other food item, or alternatively, providing a book or small toy while other family members finish eating may help make family meals enjoyable for everyone.

To help your child



establish healthy eating habits, **offer your child a variety of nutritious foods at scheduled mealtimes ( breakfast, lunch, and dinner) and snack times (1-2 daily).** Structure and predictability foster a sense of security and help your child thrive. Eating breakfast prevents children from getting too hungry and overeating later in the day--habits that lead to excess weight. If serving cereal, **provide a breakfast cereal with at least 2 grams of fiber and less than 9 grams of sugar per serving.**

## Meals

Remember, servings sizes are small for your child at this age. A serving of vegetables is 1-2 tablespoons, about the size of a quarter. Never make a child eat a vegetable bite. This will just create a battle or control issue. Remember it can take up to 12-15 times, over several months, of presenting a food before a child will eat it. As parents, we can praise our toddler for trying bites of new foods and ignore protests about food that they do not like. Avoid offering sweets at the end of a meal in exchange for eating healthy items, as this can lead to unhealthy eating habits.

## Snacks

Recent research reveals that 86% of children consume some type of sweetened beverage, dessert, or unhealthy snack (sweet or salty) a day. In fact, it was more common for a child in this age range to have an unhealthy snack than to have a serving of fruits or vegetables.

Be creative at snack time—use fruits and veggies to make up a story. **For example**, your broccoli can be a tree or celery can be a boat. Some examples of snacks include fresh cut fruits and veggies dipped in peanut butter; plain low fat greek yogurt with fresh fruit; whole grain toast with peanut butter and sliced bananas.

## Drinks

Water and low fat milk are the best **drink choices** for your child. At this age your child should be **drinking milk that is 1% or skim milk.** Discuss the best option for your child with your doctor. Toddlers need



about 3 servings of milk or milk products each day (**1 serving for this age = 1/2 cup or 120mL**). Flavoring milk with chocolate adds in unnecessary sugar to your child's diet. Chocolate or other flavoring should be limited to an occasional **or sometimes** treat.

### Skip the juice and stick with water.

Toddlers never need soda or sports drinks. Even 100% juice has a significant amount of sugar that can damage teeth. Juices are not a substitute for fruits or vegetables because of the high amount of sugar they contain.

### Eat fruit instead of drinking juice.

- Give no more than **1 cup per week of 100% juice, soda, fruit drinks, or sweetened chocolate milk. This is the latest recommendation from the American Heart Association.**

## Is my child overweight/obese?

Body Mass Index (BMI) is widely used to help define overweight and obese children. You can find your child's BMI on the paper your provider gives you after the visit or on your child's MyChart account.

**If your child is overweight, just 1 cup of juice or soda doubles their risk of becoming obese in the next year.**

## SLEEP

Your toddler still needs quite a bit of night sleep as well as a nap in the daytime. Children this age are typically sleeping 11-14 hours out of their 24 hour day. When your child doesn't sleep enough, they will be more grumpy and less likely to follow instructions.

Toddlers thrive when there is a routine, meaning the same pattern of things happen every night before sleep. Your toddler no longer needs milk to be part of this nightly pattern. A great routine is Brush,

Book and Bed. When you brush teeth, read a book, and then tuck into bed every night, your toddler will become calm as they recognize the pattern. This is especially true if you tuck them into bed at the same time every night, weekends included.

Most children are still napping. However, if your child stops sleeping in the daytime, then make sure to put them to bed earlier. They should still get the same total hours of sleep every 24 hours when they stop napping.

## Help! My toddler is coming to my bedroom at night.

Many children have a lighter sleep in the early hours of the morning. They often rouse and then seek out comfort at that time. Some children then begin a habit of joining their parents in bed in the middle of the night. If this habit is tiring you out, then here are some tips other parents have shared with us.

Make sure that you are keeping a bedtime routine: Brush, Book, Bed. Put your toddler in their own bed to fall asleep. Children who fall asleep with their parents beside them are more likely to need their parents in the middle of the night. Leave the room, telling them that you'll see them when the sun comes up.

If another parent or caretaker comes home after the child is asleep, we don't recommend that you wake the child. You might need a quiet white-noise machine so that your child doesn't hear the other adults move around your place after your child falls asleep.

When your child wakes in the night and comes to your bedroom, immediately walk them back to their room without a word spoken. Tuck them in and then return to your bedroom.

Consistency is the key. If your toddler *sometimes* gets to sleep in a parent's bed, they are more likely to keep getting up.

## Nightmares and Night Terrors

These are particularly distressing events that may occur during toddler sleep.

**Nightmares** occur later in sleep, typically more than 5 hours after falling asleep, when dreaming is more common. Children awake fearful or in tears, and may have a hard time falling back asleep. However, **night terrors** occur earlier in sleep, usually 2-3 hours after falling asleep. Night terrors are a part of sleep, when children are in a deeper phase of sleep. They are not truly awake and do not remember the event. Children may

breathe heavily, sweat or shake, and cry loudly.

### What can you do?

**For nightmares:** Go to your child and assure the child that you are there and they are safe. Remind your child that dreams are not real, and encourage them to go back to sleep when ready. It also can help to keep your child from watching scary or violent shows.

**For night terrors:** Stay calm and try not to wake your child. Waking them may make them more upset. Hold your child in your arms and then gently talk them back into sleep.

## DEVELOPMENT

**From about two and a half years to five years, children are still very active but they have learned enough language and enough of the thinking that goes along with language to be able to join in with words as well as action.** This improved ability to communicate makes your child seem like a "real person." With a little help your child can now wash their face, put on their shoes, and get a drink of water from a faucet. While every childhood phase has its frustrations, this period can also be a magical and endearing time for parent and child.

### Tips to help social and emotional development:

- When your child is speaking, listen attentively, and at times repeat what they say to clarify or to emphasize that they are heard.
- Consistent family routines, including regular playtime together and clear limits, help a child to develop a sense of security and self-control.
- **Unexplained changes in physical environment (house moves, changes in preschool, even vacations) and unexpected events can cause fears in a child this age.** Even without changes, children often start becoming afraid of things in their daily life at this age. Fears can develop because they are beginning to imagine things that frighten them. When they are afraid, try to have your child explain their fear to you or try to draw it. Listen carefully as they explain it while they draw. Then talk to them about practicing their bravery (doing something they need to do even when they are afraid). For example, if your child is suddenly afraid to go into the water, then patiently have them start by touching the water, playing with toys, then gradually stepping in.



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- **Children this age should feel comfortable playing side-by-side with other children.** Provide opportunities for your child to play with other children, but supervise these play times. Your child is not ready to share.
- **Free play time (without screens) comes first. Limit television, tablet, phone and other screen time.** Make sure that you have free time for movement (outside preferred) at least an hour everyday. This should be a family priority first, before TV or tablet time.
- It takes the interaction between an adult and a child to help your child's mind grow. That is why we recommend that children this age share any media time with the adults around them. Talk about what your child is showing interest in on the app or screen. It is also important to create screen-free times in your day; we recommend no screens during mealtime and the hour before bedtime. This helps build family connections and reduces sleep problems. And, of course, children tend to imitate what they see. Only allow them to watch things that demonstrate good behavior and role models.
- **Read books together every day. Share books together while you are shopping, waiting and before bed.**

## Whining and Tantrums

One of the toughest jobs for parents of toddlers is managing their often strong emotions. The good news is that with a little practice, between 3-4 years old, most children are able to exert more and more self-control.

When you are in your house and your child is doing something you don't like, such as whining, try your best to not listen at those times. You might say, "My ears don't work. Can you say it in your normal voice?" But at times your child will say things that really make you mad, for example, "I hate you!"

Take a deep breath and calm yourself. Some parents might address that with a family rule and a time-out while others might ignore the words meant to anger you and address the issue that brought that strong anger. That person might say, "I know you are mad that I won't let you play with my jewelry. But it is fragile and not a toy." Read more about family rules and time-out at [cdc.gov/parents/essentials](https://www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials).

Public tantrums, or when your child loses it outside your home, are some of the most difficult for parents. When your toddler has a tantrum in public, remind yourself to stay calm. Take a deep breath. Your anxiety about onlookers or your anger at your child will only make your child have a stronger reaction. Talk quietly and calmly. Many parents name the feeling they see in their child. "It looks like you are angry about not getting that cookie." You might offer choices that are acceptable to you, such as "you can't have that cookie but you can have these grapes." Some children will just get more angry. If that happens, then you might say, "You're really upset about not getting what you want. My job is to keep you safe, so I'm going to buckle you into the grocery cart (or take you to a safe place) until you can calm down." Follow through with this, with as much calm as you can. Then you might distract yourself by talking quietly about other things you see around you. Continue to ignore the crying or whining until your child is calming down too. Now you can play and interact again with them, perhaps playing I-spy together.

## Talking and Understanding

Language development is the single most important accomplishment of early childhood.

**Many people assume that preschool children with language delays or speech disorders will automatically catch up over time.** This is not necessarily true.

Although many children catch up without assistance, a significant number continue to have speech and language problems for many years and would **improve with early therapy**. A 2½ year old should be able to use a wide variety of two and four word phrases and have more than 100 word spoken vocabulary.

**Delay in speech development may be a sign of an autism spectrum disorder. Although these can be identified by 18 to 24 months, the diagnosis is often delayed until 5 years of age or later. Children with autism may show many of the following symptoms:**

- Delayed speech or loss of previously used words
- Difficulty making eye contact
- Limited gestures (waving, clapping)
- Not sharing their enjoyment or accomplishments with others
- Not sharing in emotions and facial expressions of others
- Not responding when their name is called
- Repetitive hand, finger or whole body movements
- Rigid daily routines with poor transitions to other activities or environments
- Minimal response to sensory inputs (e.g. pain) or over-reaction to sounds and textures

**If you have concerns that your child has some of these signs above, then talk to your child's provider.** Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) provides evaluations of development. Your doctor can refer you or you may also call **1-800-628-5115** or visit the ECI website at [dars.state.tx.us/ecis](https://dars.state.tx.us/ecis) for the ECI program closest to you. **After the age of 3 years, many therapy services are provided by school districts through Preschool Programs for Children with Disabilities (PPCD). If you believe your child has a disability or delay that would affect their learning, you should contact your local school district's early childhood education department to ask about an evaluation for PPCD.**

## POTTY TRAINING

1. **Timing is key** – Wait until they are interested in being in "big kid" underwear or they are concerned about being in that wet or dirty diaper. It is not recommended that you pick a toilet training time during other stressful events in your child's life. These include changes in childcare arrangements or changes to their household. If your family is preparing to move, is having a new baby or is going through a significant illness this is not the time to start potty training. Wait a few months.
2. **Be patient** - The right time is different for every child. Some kids may get it right immediately but others may take longer. Try your best not to compare children. Typically daytime potty training happens between 2 ½ -4 years of age. Nighttime training takes longer and more than 50% of 4 year olds are still needing a nighttime diaper or pullup.
3. Some families use a reward system. If you do, then make sure to choose the reward that interests your child. Initially you are

likely going to reward every success. But then you will need to change your goal, rewarding a full day of dry underwear.

4. Toddlers are excited to use their growing control over their life. However when we as parents show our children that we are very, very excited for them to potty train, this strong desire that we have as parents can backfire. Some toddlers see how much we care about potty training and then refuse to use the potty. If you see this happen, dial back the emotions you show your child about potty training. Cut out your discussions about potty training and talk about successes and failures in the same tone of voice. Talk to your doctor if you are still running into problems.

## DENTAL CARE



The following strategies can help prevent tooth problems:

- Brush your child's teeth with a soft nylon toothbrush twice a day using a small amount (smear) of a fluoride-containing toothpaste.
- Limit fruit juice and other sugary beverages. Our dentist colleagues advise drinking milk or any juice only during meals and offer only water between meals because frequent exposure to sweets increases cavities.
- Do not share eating utensils or drinks with your baby to reduce exposure to cavity-causing bacteria from your mouth.
- Drink fluoride-supplemented water.
- For patients insured by Medicaid, you can find a dental provider for your child at [www.tmhp.com](http://www.tmhp.com), or calling the THSteps Hotline at 877-847-8377.

## SAFETY

### Car Safety

Car accidents are the greatest danger to your child's life and health. To prevent these injuries, correctly USE a car safety seat EVERY TIME your child is in the car. They should stay in a 5-point-harness car seat until they outgrow it (usually well past 4 years old). The safest place for all children to ride is in the back seat.

Do you have questions about how to put your car seat in the car? Call 1-866-732-8243

or look at [seatcheck.org](http://seatcheck.org) (click Car Seat and then Get Your Seat Inspected) to find a certified technician who will check it for free.

**Do not allow your child to play in the street or driveway.** Walk behind your car before you backup your car to be sure no one is behind you. You cannot always see your child through the rear view mirror. We do recommend cars with backup cameras for families with children.

## Prevent Choking

Many food related choking deaths can be prevented by making sure food is always cut into small pieces and having your child eat while sitting down. Don't feed your child hard pieces of food. Remember: no chips, popcorn, or nuts until your child can grind them with their back teeth—after four years old.

**Small button (circular) batteries, balloons, and small magnets become dangerous in your toddler's hands.** Swallowing or putting them into their nose can put your child in the hospital. If your child might have swallowed a button (circular) battery, call right away. Make sure to keep these 3 things out of areas where your toddler plays.

## Prevent Falls and Injuries

- Place gates on the top and bottom of stairways.
- Install window locks on all windows on the 2nd floor and higher.

**To help keep kids safe from furniture and TV tip-overs:** Secure all dressers, bookcases, entertainment units, TV stands and TVs into the wall's studs. Do not place televisions on top of furniture that is not designed for TVs, such as on dressers, as they can tip over more easily.

## Prevent Drownings

**Keep your child within an arm's reach around water.** Never leave your child alone in or near a bathtub, pail of water, wading or swimming pool, or any other water—even for a moment. **During swimming parties with toddlers, make sure that one adult is designated as watcher of the pool.** Toddlers fall in easily and a child can drown even though no one hears anything out of the ordinary.

## Prevent Burns

- Keep your child out of the kitchen while you are cooking.** If your child is under foot, hot liquids, grease and hot foods can spill on him or her and cause serious burns.
- Set the maximum temperature of your**

**hot water heater to 120°F or less.** This prevents burns if your child were to play with the faucet and successfully turn on the hot water.

- All homes should have smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors.** Test the batteries on your smoke alarm every month to be sure that they work. Change the batteries twice a year on a date you'll remember, such as Daylight Saving Time and Standard Time change dates.

If your child does get burned, immediately put cold water (not ice cold) on the burned area. Then cover the burn loosely with a bandage or clean cloth. Call your doctor for all burns.

## Prevent Excessive Sun Exposure

**Avoid the sun during the hours of 10am to 4pm.** If outside, stay in the shade, use a hat to protect your child's face, and use a sunscreen with SPF 30 or greater that prevents against UVA and UVB rays. Sun exposure during childhood can cause skin cancer and premature aging of the skin later in life.

## Prevent Poisonings

Your child will be able to open any drawer and climb anywhere curiosity leads. Your child may swallow anything he or she finds. Our households have many dangerous things:

- Keep household products and medicines safely capped and out of sight and reach. Keep all products in their original containers.
- Liquid laundry and dishwasher packets have proven to be dangerous to toddlers. Keep them up high and out of reach.
- Keep vapes and e-cigarette parts and liquid up high and out of reach as well.

If your child does put something poisonous in their mouth, call the poison help line immediately. Do not make your child vomit. Add the Universal Poison Control Number (1-800-222-1222) to your cell phone contacts or download the app from American Association of Poison Control Centers called WebPoisonControl. This will guide you on what to do in case of a possible poisoning.

## Prevent Gun Injury

If you have children, it is best to not have a gun in your home. For those who keep a gun in the home, follow these safety rules:

- Always keep the gun unloaded and locked up.
- Lock and store the bullets in a separate place.
- Hide the keys to the locked boxes.

## RESOURCES

### Books

*Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5*, from The American Academy of Pediatrics.

*Your Baby and Child: From Birth to Age 5*, by Penelope Leach

*Toddler 411: Clear Answers and Smart Advice for Your Toddler*, by Ari Brown, Denise Fields

### Websites

[www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)

A parenting website developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Now available in Spanish.

[www.commonsemmedia.org](http://www.commonsemmedia.org)

Common Sense Media helps families make smart media choices, with ratings of apps, games and movies.

[www.healthychildren.org/English/media](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/media)

Set a family media plan to help establish a healthy balance of family time and "screen-time" for your family.

[www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents)

[www.vaccineinformation.org](http://www.vaccineinformation.org)

Rich websites with information on vaccines and the stories of those who lives have been touched by vaccine-preventable illness.

[www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials](http://www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials)

Frustrated with discipline? This resource gives great how-to modules on parenting.

[www.zerotothree.org/parenting-resources](http://www.zerotothree.org/parenting-resources)

This is another parenting resource that discusses common parent struggles and solutions.

[Make Safe Happen](#)

An app available for iPhone and Android that gives a room-by-room checklist of how to keep your child safe.

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