



Toddler-Time
Guide



Mercy**Kids**

Every child. Every need. Every day.



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The safety of our patients and caregivers has been, and always will be, our priority. We follow strict standards for disinfecting, required masking for patients, visitors and co-workers, and social distancing. Please do your part by following these and other CDC guidelines.

Toddler-Time Guide

After the first year of life, your baby becomes a walking, talking, independence-seeking toddler. The toddler years (ages 1-3) are full of “firsts” as your child reaches physical, cognitive, social and language milestones. You’ll see a surge of new skills, from those first wobbly steps to running around the yard, and everything in between.

With all the changes you and your toddler will experience, it helps to have advice from trusted experts. Mercy Kids created this helpful guide to navigating every age and stage of toddlerhood. We’ll help you feel confident and prepared to raise a healthy, happy toddler.

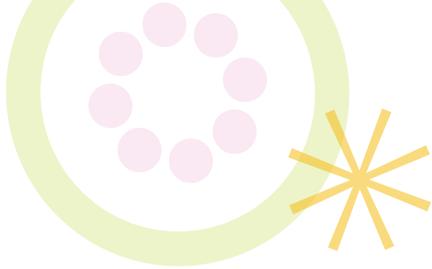
Mercy Kids

Your kids. Our expertise.

Mercy Kids is a network of care for kids across Mercy’s four states. It not only represents children’s hospitals in St. Louis and Springfield, MO, but hundreds of pediatricians, family practitioners, nurse practitioners and specialists focused on caring for kids. When your child needs medical attention, you want doctors, nurses and an entire care team who are experienced, knowledgeable and fully dedicated to meeting your child’s needs. But just as important, you want a medical team that cares as much as you do about your child’s well-being. Our whole focus is your child’s health — body, mind and spirit.

Need a health care provider?

Find your toddler’s pediatrician, family practitioner or nurse practitioner and make an appointment online at mercy.net/KidsDocs



Toddler Milestones

Every child is different, and developmental milestones are reached at different rates. For example, some kids start walking as early as nine months and others at nearly 18 months — and both can be normal. These milestones are general guidelines based on what most toddlers can do as they grow. If you have questions or concerns about your child’s development, share them with your child’s health care provider, who may be a pediatrician, family medicine provider or nurse practitioner, depending on the office where you get your care.



Your Changing 1-Year-Old

By their first birthday, **most toddlers can...**



PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE	SOCIAL	LANGUAGE
Pull up to stand	Learn through exploration	Make and keep eye contact	Use gestures
Cruise holding on to furniture	Find hidden objects	Play games like peek-a-boo or patty-cake	Say “dada” and “mama”
Try taking steps	Point to objects they want	Have favorite toys and people	Shake head “no” and wave “bye-bye”



Welcome to the toddler years! The changes you’ll see this year are simply amazing. At age 1, toddlers are very curious and ready to explore the world around them. Watch for pulling up to become cruising along furniture and even taking a few steps. Here are a few helpful tips as your baby transitions to a wonderful 1-year-old.





What Happens at Well-Child Visits

A complete physical exam is part of every well-child visit for your toddler.

Your child's length, weight, head circumference, eyes, mouth, abdomen, neurologic responses and skin are examined. You and your Mercy care provider will discuss your toddler's development, nutrition, sleep, safety and more. Well-child visits are a great time to raise questions or concerns you may have about your developing toddler. You might find it helpful to bring a list of questions with you to the visit. Your Mercy care provider is your partner in your toddler's care, and it's important to communicate openly as your child continues to grow.

Understanding Immunizations

Immunizations protect your toddler from potentially life-threatening diseases like polio, measles, diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), influenza and many others. Each year, top disease experts and doctors recommend the vaccines that will best protect kids based on the most recent scientific data. Any changes needed are announced in January. The immunization schedule is approved by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the CDC and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Your Mercy care provider stays updated on any changes, so check in with them if you have questions or concerns.

At age 1, immunizations may include a combination vaccine of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (also called DTaP), hemophilus influenza B (also called Hib) and polio; a combination vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella (the MMR); and vaccines for Hepatitis A, chicken pox (also called varicella) and rotavirus.



Foods to Avoid

Chewing with a grinding motion doesn't develop until age 4, so make sure your child's food is mashed or cut into very small, easily chewable pieces. Avoid peanuts, whole grapes, cherry tomatoes (unless they're cut into quarters), whole carrots, seeds, whole or large sections of hot dogs, meat sticks or hard candies (including jellybeans or gummy bears). Spread peanut butter thinly on bread or crackers.

Nutrition at Age 1

It's never too early to instill healthy eating habits in your child. Just like you, 1-year-olds need nutritious foods and a balanced diet with plenty of healthy proteins, vegetables and fruits. Provide your child with selections from each of the basic food groups, and let them experiment with a wide variety of tastes, colors and textures. Avoid sugar-sweetened beverages, high-calorie snacks and sweets.

Starting the Sippy Cup

Experts say you can introduce the sippy cup as early as age 6-10 months, and your toddler should be completely off the bottle by their first birthday. Use the sippy cup for all liquids your child consumes, then step up to an open cup when your toddler is ready, usually around age 2. Speech therapists say learning to drink from a straw is important to speech development. As you introduce new ways of drinking, keep in mind that too much milk and juice can lead to tooth decay. And don't allow your toddler to keep a sippy cup with them for long periods of time.

Do toddlers need annual flu shots?

Yes. The AAP recommends an annual influenza vaccine for all kids age 6 months and older. Ideally, your toddler should receive their flu vaccine by the end of October.



What about the COVID-19 vaccine?

COVID-19 is a rapidly changing virus, and researchers are working to develop vaccines that are safe for kids. Your Mercy care provider will keep you updated as COVID-19 vaccine research progresses.

Your Fun-Loving 15-Month-Old

By 15 months, most toddlers can...

PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE	SOCIAL	LANGUAGE
Begin to walk	Look at books and listen to stories	Show joyful emotion	Say three to five words
Climb	Name familiar people and possessions	Protest what they don't like	Understand words like "lunchtime"
Scribble with crayons	Fit things into holes	Play alongside other kids	Point to body parts

You'll start to see your toddler's personality shine through at 15 months. It's an age of laughing, playing and communicating likes and dislikes in a more decisive way. Your toddler may be moving around confidently at 15 months, becoming more comfortable with their environment and the people in it.

Skip Screen Time

The AAP recommends no electronics (screen time) for children under age 2. This includes parents' laptops and smartphones (except for occasional Skyping or FaceTiming with distant family or friends). Screen time can affect your toddler's development, leading to poor sleep, attention problems, behavior issues and more. Yet an AAP survey showed 90% of children under age 2 use some form of electronic media, and toddlers watch one to two hours of television daily. To combat developmental risks, experts recommend encouraging active play. Running in open spaces, playing outdoors and indoor activities like nesting cups support healthier toddler development. Avoid placing a television in your child's bedroom. The more physically active kids are early in life, the more active they're likely to be as they grow.

Join in the Fun

Simple activities can help you bond with your toddler while supporting their development. Here are a few activities to try with your 15-month old:

- **Bottle bowling** – Arrange a few empty plastic beverage bottles like bowling pins. In a clear space, show your toddler how to roll a large ball and knock them over. Watch your toddler's joy when they bowl a strike!
- **Feely feet** – Make a textured obstacle course for your toddler to walk on. Use different fabrics and textured materials like rugs. Ask your child to tell you how it feels. Is it soft? Bumpy? This helps your toddler experience sensory feedback through their feet.
- **Mommy says** – Like the popular children's game, you and your toddler can have fun following simple directions, such as, "Mommy says touch your nose. Mommy says hop in the air. Mommy says flap your wings like a bird."
- **Finger painting for two** – Finger painting is an excellent tactile activity that stimulates toddlers' senses and cognitive skills. Using your index finger, draw basic lines and shapes, and then have your child imitate you.

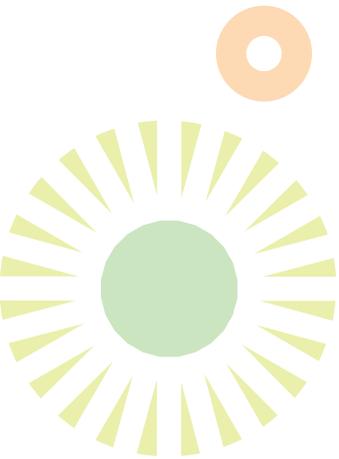


Picky Eater? Here's How to Cope

Picky eating is typical toddler behavior. A favorite food one week can be refused the next. It's because your toddler's growth rate and appetite are slowing down after the rapid development of infancy.

Try these tips to keep frustration at bay as your toddler develops new eating habits:

- **Eat as a family** - Eat meals with your child whenever possible, offering healthy food choices from the basic food groups. Toddlers learn eating habits by modeling what you do.
- **Make foods fun** - Present colorful foods in interesting shapes or try adding sauces to attract your toddler's interest. They love finger foods, so try cutting solid foods into very small pieces.
- **Get them involved** - Try giving your toddler control over the foods they need to try. If they "help" mix ingredients for dinner or select from a choice of sides, they may become more interested in eating.
- **Don't bribe** - Serve small portions and encourage your child to eat by emphasizing a food's color, appearance, aroma and texture, not its flavor.
- **Avoid the food fight** - Toddlers may refuse meals, especially if they've eaten larger meals or snacks earlier in the day. Instead of pressuring your toddler, simply make healthy food choices available and know their eating habits will improve with time.





18 Months & On-the-Go

By 18 months, **most toddlers can...**

PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE	SOCIAL	LANGUAGE
Walk steadily	Interact physically (and sometimes aggressively)	Identify their reflection in a mirror	Understand verbal commands like “sit down”
Use steps with help	Imitate you, such as talking on the phone	Group similar objects	Say their own name
Eat with a spoon	Experience separation anxiety	Listen to stories	Point to get the attention of others

You likely have a walker who is gaining even more confidence at 18 months. Your toddler is also developing a stronger sense of self and the ability to communicate more effectively. They may be openly affectionate and respond to praise. And while they may be anxious around strangers, 18-month-olds can quickly show their independent side.

Separation Anxiety Explained

As toddlers develop independence, they become more aware of separation and understand when you’re gone. Separations are even harder when kids are hungry, tired or sick. To ease your child’s anxiety, try creating rituals like providing a special blanket or toy when you leave. Drop off at the same time each day to make it more routine, and keep the good-byes short. When you linger, the anxiety can, too.

Why Reading to Your Toddler Matters

Reading exposes your toddler to new ideas and things, like dinosaurs and oceans. When you read to your child, it familiarizes them with the sounds and rhythms of language. Stories that rhyme are especially helpful.

By engaging your toddler’s imagination, reading also stimulates imaginative play — a primary way children learn about the world. Continue to read to your kids, even as they get older. Reading and other activities, such as writing, drawing or playing musical instruments, can help children learn to think and express themselves in new ways.

Stick to a Sleep Routine

Establishing consistent sleep routines should begin as early as age 6 months. At 18 months, focus on maintaining consistent sleep at both bedtime and naps. Toddlers who get enough sleep have healthier immune systems and better behavior, memory and mental health. A change that occurs at age 15-18 months in some toddlers is moving from two naps to one per day. This varies from child to child, and your toddler should still be getting 14-15 hours of total sleep daily. You can help your toddler sleep well by setting up a quiet and consistent bedtime routine. Use this time for a soothing bath, reading a story together or listening to soft music. Playing before bedtime makes it harder for your toddler to wind down. A final sip of water, leaving a nightlight on or allowing your toddler to take a favorite toy to bed can also be part of an effective sleep routine.



Time for the Twos

By their second birthday, **most toddlers can...**

PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE	SOCIAL	LANGUAGE
Begin to run	Get excited around other kids	Name items in a book, such as cat, dog or bird	Point to objects when they're named
Stand on tiptoe	Begin including other kids in play	Finish sentences in books	Use names of familiar people and body parts
Kick a ball	Show defiant behavior (do what they're told not to)	Sort shapes and colors	Say sentences with two to four words

Because of toddlers' increasing desire for independence, this stage is sometimes called the "terrible twos." But keep in mind your toddler is practicing being their own person. Emotional growth is taking off, bringing with it laughter one minute and tantrums the next. And 2-year-olds love to participate in daily activities and "help" you.

Taming Tantrums

Tantrums happen in toddlerhood. You may not always be able to prevent them, but here are a few ways to cope:

- **Pay attention and praise success** – Give your toddler plenty of attention and "catch them being good." Praise those successful moments. And if one of your kids has tantrums more than another, it's likely personality and not the amount of attention you're providing.
- **Offer choices** – During a tantrum, give your child control over little things by offering small, directed choices with options. "Do you want to lay on the bed, or would you like to look at a book?"

- **Be a master of distraction** – Move to a new room, offer a safer toy or even sing a song. Try to break the tension.
- **Be consistent but realistic** – Consistency is key. Reinforce the rules and what's acceptable behavior with every tantrum. But realistically, you'll end up surrendering at times.
- **Address out-of-bounds behavior** – Don't ignore behaviors like biting, throwing, hitting or kicking. Call out the behavior, and let your toddler know the consequence, such as losing a toy or privilege.
- **Take a break** – Don't go it alone. Take turns with another parent, a relative or a friend when your frustration peaks.
- **Be proactive** – Have a healthy snack with you when you're out of the house. Prioritize naps and bedtime, even with a busy schedule. It'll pay off with fewer tantrums.





Is it Time for Potty Training?

Experts say there's no "right age" to potty train your toddler. Readiness depends on the individual child. In general, starting before age 2 isn't recommended. The skills and physical development your toddler needs for successful potty training occur between 18 months and 2 ½ years. So how can you tell your child is ready? Look for cues like waking up dry in the morning or after naps, imitating your behavior, putting things where they belong, pulling clothes up and down, showing interest in potty training (such as following you to the bathroom) and indicating first when they need to "go."



Use Car Seats Correctly

Proper use of car seats helps keep toddlers safer on the road. All babies and toddlers should remain rear-facing for at least two years (preferably longer). The type of seat your child needs depends on several things, including their age, size and developmental needs. **More information is available from the AAP about choosing an appropriate car seat for your child.** Kids who outgrow weight or height limits for their convertible seats should use forward-facing seats with harnesses for as long as possible, up to the highest weight or height allowed by manufacturers. Many car seats accommodate kids up to 65 pounds or more.



Growing Strong at 2 ½

By age 2 ½, most toddlers can...

PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE	SOCIAL	LANGUAGE
Jump with both feet off the ground	Communicate emotions	Show increased attention span	Communicate simple needs like hunger
Turn a doorknob	Value property and say "mine"	Understand two-step commands	Increase vocabulary to 50+ words
Turn one page at a time	Develop strong fears	Help with dressing	Refer to self with pronouns like "me"

Between ages 2-3, your toddler’s vocabulary and communication skills are expanding. You may wonder if your child’s new favorite word is “mine.” And toddlers begin trying to solve problems on their own at this age, such as putting an arm in the wrong sleeve. They’ve become more coordinated, and they’re able to clear the ground when jumping.

Achoo! All About Allergies

Normally, your toddler’s immune system fights off harmful viruses and bacteria. But sometimes the immune system overreacts, identifying harmless things like pollen or pets as threats to the body. The result is an allergic reaction. Allergies can feel like a cold, and symptoms may include a runny, stuffy or itchy nose, watering eyes and sneezing. Toddlers may also have headaches or fatigue. Mercy care providers know how to help your child get relief from allergies. They’ll evaluate your toddler’s symptoms and environment with a thorough history and physical exam. Your child’s doctor may recommend skin or blood tests to look for specific allergens. For food allergies, an elimination diet can help identify the culprits.

Toothbrushing for Toddlers

Even the tiniest teeth can get tooth decay, so experts recommend toothbrushing as soon as teeth emerge. Brush your toddler’s teeth two times per day for two minutes using a soft baby toothbrush and a small smear (the size of a grain of rice) of fluoride toothpaste. The best times to brush are after breakfast and before bed. Remember: a toothbrush should be the last thing to touch your toddler’s teeth every night. Ask your Mercy care provider about the timing of your toddler’s first trip to the dentist. Some doctors recommend seeing the dentist by age 1 or six months after the first tooth appears. And discuss application of protective fluoride varnish with your child’s doctor.

See Toddler Eye Care Clearly

As part of each well-child visit, your toddler’s eye health, vision development and eye alignment will be checked. If a problem is found during routine eye exams, your Mercy care provider may recommend your child see a pediatric ophthalmologist — an eye doctor trained and experienced in the care of kids’ eye problems. Toddlers with a family history of childhood vision problems are at increased risk of developing them. Eye problems found early have a better chance of being treated successfully.



Your Busy-Bee at Age 3

By their third birthday, **most toddlers can...**



PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE	SOCIAL	LANGUAGE
Run easily	Separate more easily from parents	Play make-believe with toys and people	Understand words like “in” and “under”
Climb well	Take turns in games	Do puzzles with three or four pieces	Name most familiar things
Peddle a tricycle	Show concern for a crying friend	Dress and undress themselves	Use two to three sentences

Your baby isn't a baby anymore, and you may have quite a busy-bee at age 3. At this age, toddlers can explore their worlds easily, spend more time outside the home and may have endless questions about everything around them. Interactions with family and familiar people are helping to shape their personality.

Preventing Childhood Obesity

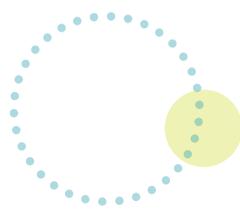
About 40% of U.S. children are overweight or obese, and childhood obesity is now recognized as a public health priority. It's never too early to start helping your toddler maintain a healthy weight for life. Remember that prevention of childhood obesity begins as soon as your child starts eating regular food, at age 1 or earlier. Throughout toddlerhood, simple steps like cutting back on sugary beverages, adding more fruits and vegetables and increasing physical activity can help keep your child from gaining excess weight. Being at a healthy weight helps protect them from chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, sleep apnea, orthopedic problems and liver disease.

Support for Shy Kids

Not all toddlers are extroverts, and shyness is a normal stage of social development for some kids. While one child may be comfortable around new people and situations, another may prefer to stay in familiar territory. If your toddler shies away from social situations, try these techniques to support them:

- **Model social behavior** – Toddlers learn by watching you and others around them. Your ability to approach and interact comfortably with others helps your toddler learn to do the same.
- **Take baby steps** – Encourage (but don't force) your toddler to say “hi” to another child or to join in group play for a few minutes.
- **Look for shared interests** – Does your toddler like books? Kicking a ball? Encourage them to partner with another child in a favorite activity to spark interaction.
- **Recognize success** – Give your toddler lots of praise for every step toward becoming more comfortable around others.

If things don't improve and your toddler gets extremely upset around others or seems sad and anxious, check in with your Mercy care provider for advice.





Tips for the First Day of Day Care

Starting out-of-home care is a big step for your toddler. It may be the first time they've spent significant time away from you and in the company of so many other kids. Being prepared makes new experiences easier on your toddler.

Try these strategies to help them adjust:

- Visit the center or home with your toddler before beginning care. Show them you like and trust the caregiver.
- Allow your child to carry a reminder of home, such as a toy or blanket, to day care.
- Talk with your child about day care and the caregiver.
- Read books about day care, which can be found at your local library.



Injury Prevention

One of your most important jobs as a parent is keeping your toddler safe.

Review Mercy's injury-prevention guidelines and continue following them as your toddler grows.

Help Keep Kids Injury-Free

Injuries are a leading cause of kids' hospitalizations. Use these tips to help keep children safe.

Bike Safety

- Have kids wear helmets at all times.
- Teach kids to ride in the direction of traffic and to obey laws.
- Provide reflective gear, and limit bike riding to daytime.
- Give kids' bikes a yearly checkup (brakes, tires, etc.).

Fire & Burn Safety

- Install smoke alarms where kids sleep and on every level of the house.
- Never leave food unattended while cooking, and monitor kids' use of ovens and microwaves.
- Set your water heater temperature to 120° F.
- Keep hot liquids out of kids' reach.

Pet Safety

- Teach kids to ask permission before petting animals.
- Warn children not to bother pets that are sleeping, eating or caring for babies.
- Never leave kids alone with pets — even well-known family pets.

Car Safety

- Buy age-appropriate safety seats, and buckle them in correctly.
- Keep kids rear-facing until age 2 (or when safety seat height or weight is reached).
- Make sure kids ride in back seat until age 12.
- Avoid abdominal injury with the right safety seat for your child's age and weight.
- Discuss driving distractions with teens (texting, eating, loud music, etc.).

Swim Safety

- Teach kids to swim, and/or enroll them in swimming lessons.
- Supervise kids in or around water, and keep them within arm's reach of an adult.
- Use Coast Guard-approved life jackets and flotation devices.

Sleep Safety

- Place infants on a firm sleep surface with no pillows, blankets, etc.
- Put babies to sleep on their backs until age 1.
- Make sure infants sleep separately from their parents until age 1.

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Options for Pediatric Care

Your toddler's Mercy pediatric clinic is the first and best place to call when they need care.

The clinic has a triage nurse or after-hours exchange to help you find the most appropriate care for your child. And when you can't see your child's regular pediatrician, family medicine provider or nurse practitioner, Mercy offers other options to receive excellent pediatric care.

Know Where to Go

WITH **MERCY KIDS**, YOU HAVE **OPTIONS**.

PC

PRIMARY CARE



Your child's PCP should be your first stop for most issues, such as:

- Annual checkups/exams
- Newborn weight and feeding checks
- School or sports physicals
- Depression, anxiety or ADHD
- Immunizations and vaccinations
- Acute issues like fever or ear pain
- Chronic conditions like asthma or diabetes

UC

URGENT CARE



If the PCP office is closed, use Urgent Care for issues with school-aged kids, such as:

- Coughs, colds and flu
- Allergic reactions or rashes
- Cuts, wounds, burns or falls
- Sprains and strains
- Urinary pain
- Stomach pain, nausea or diarrhea

ER

EMERGENCY ROOM



Go to the ER when your child is having emergency symptoms, such as:

- Difficulty breathing
- Dehydration
- Poisoning or drug overdose
- Broken bones, burns or bleeding
- Choking, drowning or suffocation
- 100.4° fever or higher in babies under 8 weeks

In case of emergency, call 911 immediately.

Mercy Kids

Find an urgent care near you at mercy.net/UC



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Every child. Every need. Every day.

