

## TIP SHEET: Independent Eating

Ages Affected: 1–2 years old

When children are toddlers, they will begin exploring how to eat on their own. This not only includes learning how to use a fork and spoon, it also means that they realize when they are hungry and full. This is an exciting time for you both—make it fun!

### The signs that they are ready to eat on their own:

Toddlers will start to eat with their fingers and gradually learn to hold utensils between 12-24 months. This is also the time to teach them to enjoy and want healthy foods.

### Here are some tips to help teach your child to eat on his own:

- Give your child small portions and allow her to ask for more if she is still hungry.
- Let him help with the easy stuff like spreading peanut butter or helping you pour milk in a cup. It could get a little messy at first, but it teaches him independence.
- This is also a good time to start to get your child interested in healthy foods. Make healthy food fun. Use cookie cutters to make shapes out of food and give food fun names that she will enjoy.
- If your child doesn't like a certain food, don't give up. It can take up to 10 tries for your child to like a new food.
- Always place your child's bowl, plate, cup, and utensils in the same place on her highchair tray or at the table. This will help her learn faster.



- As you put food on your child's plate, show him where each item is. When he is older, you can start describing food so he learns what he is eating. It's okay to let him gently touch his food to see what he is about to eat.
- Don't forget to praise your child for eating with his utensils. Say "James, that's really good eating, I like how you're using your spoon."
- Have regular meal times so she begins to understand normal meal times. Try to set aside 20-30 minutes to help her eat.