

characteristic food habits of children in this age group. Parents may be tempted to rely on vitamin supplementation, rather than a well-balanced diet, to meet these requirements. Toddlers usually require three meals and two snacks per day; however, the portions consumed are generally smaller compared with those of older children.

The 2008 Feeding Infants and Toddlers Study (FITS) ([Butte, Fox, Briefel, et al, 2010](#)) found that, in general, toddlers met or exceeded the requirements for daily energy and protein requirements. However, intake of a variety of foods was seen with advancing age in toddlers as their food preferences changed. FITS recommended that toddlers be fed a more balanced diet of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains.

At approximately 18 months old, most toddlers manifest this decreased nutritional need with a decreased appetite, a phenomenon known as **physiologic anorexia**. They become picky, fussy eaters with strong taste preferences. They may eat large amounts one day and almost nothing the next. Toddlers are increasingly aware of the nonnutritive function of food (i.e., the pleasure of eating, the social aspect of mealtime, and the control of refusing food). They are influenced by factors other than taste when choosing food. If a family member refuses to eat something, toddlers are likely to imitate that response. If the plate is overfilled, they are likely to push it away, overwhelmed by its size. If food does not appear or smell appetizing, they will probably not agree to try it. In essence, mealtime is more closely associated with psychological components than with nutritional ones. Toddlers like to eat with their fingers and enjoy foods of different colors and shapes.

The **ritualism** of this age also dictates certain principles in feeding practices. Toddlers like to have the same dish, cup, or spoon every time they eat. They may reject a favorite food simply because it is served in a different dish. If one food touches another, they often refuse to eat it. Mixed foods, such as stews or casseroles, are rarely favorites. Because toddlers have unpredictable table manners, it is best to use plastic dishes and cups for both economic and safety reasons. For some children, a regular mealtime schedule also contributes to their desire and need for predictability and ritualism.