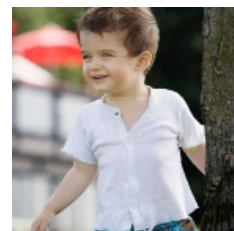




## Physical Appearance and Growth: Your 2 Year Old

Although your toddler's growth rate will slow between his second and third birthdays, nevertheless he will continue his remarkable physical transformation from baby to child. The most dramatic change will occur in his bodily proportions. As an infant, he had a relatively large head and short legs and arms; now his head growth will slow, from  $3\frac{3}{4}$  inch (2 cm) in his second year alone to  $3\frac{3}{4}$  to  $11\frac{1}{4}$  inches (2–3 cm) over the next ten years. At the same time, his height will increase, primarily because his legs and, to some degree, the rest of his body will be growing quickly. With these changes in the rates of growth, his body and legs will look much more in proportion.



The baby fat that seemed to make your infant so cuddly in the first months of life gradually will disappear during these preschool years. The percentage of fat, which reached a peak at age one, will steadily decrease to approximately half that by his fifth birthday. Notice how his arms and thighs become more slender and his face less round. Even the pads of fat under the arches, which have until now given the appearance of flat feet, will disappear.

His posture will change, as well, during this time. His pudgy, babyish look as a toddler has been partly due to his posture, particularly his protruding abdomen and inwardly curving lower back. But as his muscle tone improves and his posture becomes more erect, he'll develop a longer, leaner, stronger appearance.

Although it will happen more slowly now, your child will continue to grow steadily. Preschoolers grow an average of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches (6 cm) annually and gain about 4 pounds (2 kg) each year. Plot your child's height and weight on growth charts to compare his rate of growth to the average for this age. If you should notice a pronounced lapse in growth, discuss it with your pediatrician. She probably will tell you there is no need to become overly concerned, as some healthy children just may not grow as quickly during their second and third years as their playmates seem to do.

Less commonly, this pause in growth during the toddler or preschool years may signal something else—perhaps a chronic health problem, such as kidney or liver disease, or a recurrent infection. In rare cases, slow growth may be due to a disorder of one of the hormone glands or to gastrointestinal complications of some chronic illnesses. Your pediatrician will take all of these things into consideration when she examines your child.

At the age of two, don't be surprised if your child is eating less than you think he should. Children need fewer calories at this time because they're growing more slowly. But even though he's eating less, he still can remain well nourished as long as you make a variety of healthy foods available to him. Encourage healthy snacks and begin establishing sound and healthful eating habits. At the same time, if he seems overly preoccupied with food and appears to be accumulating excess weight, talk to your pediatrician about ways to help manage his weight. Early eating behaviors can influence the risk of obesity throughout life, so managing your child's weight in childhood is as important as it is at any stage of life.

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**Source** Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5 (Copyright © 2009 American Academy of Pediatrics)

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