

Who's feeding our toddlers? It's a job share...

New data shows that 30% of toddler meals provided by carers other than parents

'Ten Steps for Healthy Toddlers' launched to help parents, carers and healthcare professionals share the task of feeding toddlers

A new survey from the **Infant & Toddler Forum** (ITF) shows that British parents rely on a complex support network – including nurseries, childminders, grandparents and extended family – all of whom play an important role in feeding their toddlers. In fact, the survey shows that the average toddler typically has almost **30%** of their meals provided by people other than their parents.

This may not be a big surprise given the nature of our modern lifestyle, but it may affect the wellbeing of toddlers if the quality and quantity of meals provided are inconsistent and unbalanced and if positive attitudes to food and exercise are not systematically encouraged.

*To approach feeding toddlers with confidence, carers need consistent, simple and sound advice that can be applied everywhere toddlers are fed”, comments Atul Singhal, Chair of the **Infant & Toddler Forum** and Honorary Consultant Paediatrician, Great Ormond Street Hospital, “and this is exactly what the ITF have developed with the Ten Steps for Healthy Toddlers. Launched this month the ‘Ten Steps’ is an easy-to-use guide for parents and carers on what food to offer toddlers, what behaviour to encourage and how best to manage mealtimes.”*

Most parents and carers are keen to do the best for toddlers and through education, it may be possible to address the cycle of poor nutrition by empowering parents and carers to make informed choices. The Infant & Toddler Forum believes that the 'Ten Steps' will go some way to achieving this.

The survey shows that parents are often anxious that those who look after their toddlers are not providing healthy food choices with **over one third** of parents concerned that their toddlers may not be getting healthy, balanced meals. Of these, **50%** say that their toddlers are given too many treats.

However, the data also highlight that parents themselves are confused about how to feed their toddlers. **Over one third** are confused about or unaware of how toddlers' nutritional needs differ from those of adults and **77%** say that they have never received clear advice about portion sizes for toddlers.

Providing toddlers with a healthy start has become a public health priority because not only do toddlers need a healthy balanced diet to thrive, but the foods they learn to like in their early years can help shape eating habits that influence their health in later life. Good eating habits can help prevent serious health problems, including obesity, heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

Kate Lawrence, full time mum to Freddie (5) and Darcey (2), from Berkshire, says: *“Like many mums, I rely on childcare and family support to look after my toddler during the week. But with so many people involved I’m not always sure what she’s eating. I think I am giving a healthy, balanced diet but I am not always absolutely certain which is worrying. Some really simple tips that I could also give to my nursery and my parents when they are looking after her would be a big help.”*

In developing the *Ten Steps*, the **Infant & Toddler Forum** has worked in collaboration with healthcare professional bodies and stakeholders and is continuing to work with partners to ensure the widest dissemination to parents, carers and healthcare professionals.

Neil Leitch, Acting Chief Executive, Pre-school Learning Alliance, which endorses the *Ten Steps*, says:

*“We all need to ensure that children start to develop healthy eating habits from the earliest possible age. Our experience shows us that many settings do an admirable job of providing nutritious meals despite budgetary constraints, but there is room for improvement in some areas. The *Ten Steps for Healthy Toddlers* is exactly the kind of practical resource that will help practitioners to get the balance right.”*

Ten Steps for Healthy Toddlers is available for download from www.littlepeoplesplates.co.uk

– Ends –

For more information contact: Seán Carroll, Infant & Toddler Forum Secretariat, 020 8971 6408, scarroll@saycomms.co.uk or Helen Frostick 0208 971 6425 hfrostick@saycomms.co.uk

Notes to editors

- The Infant and Toddler Forum brings together a multidisciplinary team of experts dedicated to improving the access of healthcare professionals to practical evidence-based information on the nutrition and feeding of children under three and thereby equip them to advise and support the parents and carers of young children.
- Little People’s Plates (www.littlepeoplesplates.co.uk) is an education initiative aimed at parents and carers of children from one to three years that seeks to highlight the importance of the correct nutrition this age group needs. Its objective is to provide mums with practical tips, plus evidence-based guidance to help them to make the right food choices for their toddlers whether food is home cooked or pre- prepared. Little People’s Plates is driven by the Infant & Toddler Forum (I&TF), an independent team of specialists in child nutrition and development.
- The **‘Who’s feeding your toddler?’** survey was carried out by One Poll in May 2010. 1,000 parents of toddlers aged one to three were surveyed.
- The Infant and Toddler Forum is supported by an educational grant from Danone UK. All resources produced by the Forum represent the independent views of the Forum with whom copyright rests.
- The consumer research also found that:
 - Grandparents, nurseries and childminders all play an important role in feeding toddlers with **one in five** families saying nurseries and childminders and **one in four** saying grandparents are involved in a typical week.
 - **40%** of families do not eat together on a daily basis
 - Over **70%** of parents use sweet foods/pudding as a reward to encourage their toddler to eat their meals
 - Only **23%** of parents have been advised to give vitamin supplements to their toddler and almost **60%** never give their toddlers vitamin supplements