

Challenging behaviour at one year #1

Throwing, dunking and rejecting food

Babies' behaviour at the table often changes as they approach their first birthday. Throwing, dunking and rejecting food aren't done just to annoy mum and dad, though. Here are some tips on what's happening and why, and how you can deal with it.

Throwing food

Some likely reasons for your baby throwing food:

- "I've eaten enough, thanks!" or "I want some food, but not this food!"
- "I don't want to eat now (there's something else I'd rather be doing)".
- They need less to eat than before. Babies grow more slowly in their second year than in their first, so it's normal for their appetite to diminish slightly.
- General tiredness, impending illness, or frustration at something else, such as feeling 'trapped' in a high chair (see below).

What to do:

- Don't keep on picking up the food and giving it back, or offering more, the way you would with a younger baby who is experimenting. Your older baby is trying to tell you something and from his point of view, you're not listening. This can quickly lead to overwhelming frustration for him (aka a tantrum).
- Accept what your baby is trying to tell you. Either move on to the next course, end the meal, or ...
- ... pick up the dropped food and put it on the edge of your own plate, so your baby can still see it and can ask for it back if he or she does want it.

Dunking food into cups

Why babies do this:

- Experimenting: putting things into other things, and learning to throw, are important ways for babies to learn about size, shape and gravity (think of the sort of toys we give them, for just this reason)
- From your baby's point of view, dropping a Brussels sprout into a cup of water is not really any different from dunking bread into a bowl of soup or dipping a stick of cucumber into some hummus.

What to do:

- Nothing, unless it's really annoying you. The need to experiment like this will pass once your baby has learnt what happens and has noticed that you don't do this yourself.

- If it *is* really annoying you, you could gently intercept your baby's hand on its way to the cup, saying something like "Not in there, X – can you give it to me, please?" Or ...
- ... keep the cup (and your own glass!) out of reach until your baby signals that they would like a drink.
- Above all, aim to stay calm and focus on showing and guiding, not scolding or punishing.

Turning down finger foods and wanting food in small pieces

Likely reasons:

- Your baby is growing up and acquiring new skills. As with walking, talking etc., they want to practise and become more competent.
- They want to copy others.

What to do:

- While going along with this may make mealtimes slower initially, especially if they are practising with cutlery, try to welcome and recognise your baby's achievements.
- Don't be surprised if they revert to more babyish ways if they're poorly, tired or stressed.

Remember: At this age, whatever your baby is doing at the table is *not* being done deliberately to annoy you – but choosing BLW doesn't mean you have to tolerate anything and everything, either! Take a moment to think about why your baby is behaving this way, then try to strike a balance between demonstrating what sort of behaviour is expected at the table and recognising what your child's needs are at that particular meal.

Gill Rapley, September 2017