

When Can a Child Transition From a High Chair to a Booster Seat?

By Maureen Ryan | Updated on July 01, 2021

✓ Fact checked by Rich Scherr

It probably seems like just yesterday that you were strapping a barely steady baby into a high chair for their first taste of solid food. While some children continue to use a high chair happily and safely into the preschool years, others need to move on much earlier. A booster seat can be a good option for a toddler who wants to eat at the table like the rest of the family, but isn't tall or balanced enough to sit in a regular chair.

Before you choose a booster seat, however, consider whether it offers the right support for your child and will work with your dining area and family eating habits. Here are some important facts to consider as you weigh the pros and cons of a booster chair.

Your Child's Size and Stage of Development

Before their first birthday, many babies might be able to use a booster as long as they are able to sit up on their own. However, some booster seats have little all-around support or safety belts and may not be appropriate for younger children. For instance, travel boosters do not usually have a front tray or lock-in system, which can help smaller toddlers and babies keep themselves upright.

Most children are steady enough for all types of boosters by 18 months of age. However, larger toddlers may be too big for some booster seats. If your child is strong enough to wiggle the booster forcefully (which can loosen the safety straps securing it to the dining chair, or move a non-strap booster), you may need to forget this option altogether. For larger toddlers and young preschoolers, consider:

- Products like Kaboost, which raises the chair from the bottom so your child can reach the table while sitting unassisted.
- A child-sized table where your toddler and siblings can eat some meals independently.

Your Toddler's Disposition

For a toddler who doesn't like to be held down, a booster seat can offer a little more sense of freedom and equality with the rest of the family since they are pushed right up to the table. The newfound joy of being fully included may help with some challenging behaviors, such as food fussiness or dinner-time tantrums.

Getting rid of the high chair may also be a good idea if you have a climbing toddler. Little ones are often tempted to scale the sides of high chairs or climb into and out of the seat, which can be dangerous.

Even with a booster, you need to be vigilant when you have a climber. Your toddler might easily be able to climb into the booster. But once up there, they are at great risk of falling both while sitting and while trying to get back down. Luckily, boosters can easily be removed from your dining chair and stored in a safe place between meals and snacks to eliminate the temptation.

Your Table and House Set-Up

Keep in mind that you need a specific type of set-up to use a booster safely. Only attach a booster chair to a sturdy, hard-backed dining chair. Check the specific requirements for the booster—some also require that the chair have a hard surface seat (no cushion). If you have lightweight dining chairs or use folding chairs, a booster is not for you.

The kitchen or dining table needs to be heavy so your toddler can't push it forward or topple anything while seated at the table. Don't place the chair with a booster near the wall—toddlers might push off the wall with their feet and tip over.

Never leave your baby unattended in the booster seat. If you know you will need to step away from the booster (even just momentarily) because of how your kitchen and dining area is set up, forget the booster and look for a sturdy high chair that is mobile.

If part of your frustration with the high chair is tied to the nearly impossible mission of cleaning it completely, know that the booster makes the chore much easier. With typical models of high chairs, you have straps to scrub and soak and crevices that hold fossilized

crumbs of cookies and Cheerios. With a typical booster, you can put the entire seat into the sink (or dishwasher!) for a hose-down.

4 Sources

Verywell Family uses only high-quality sources, including peer-reviewed studies, to support the facts within our articles. Read our editorial process to learn more about how we fact-check and keep our content accurate, reliable, and trustworthy.

1. Ong C, Phuah KY, Salazar E, How CH. Managing the 'picky eater' dilemma. *Singapore Med J.* 2014;55(4):184-9. doi:10.11622/smedj.2014049
2. Benjasuwantep B, Chaithirayanon S, Eiamudomkan M. Feeding problems in healthy young children: Prevalence, related factors and feeding practices. *Pediatr Rep.* 2013;5(2):38-42. doi:10.4081/pr.2013.e10
3. Ablewhite J, McDaid L, Hawkins A, et al. Approaches used by parents to keep their children safe at home: A qualitative study to explore the perspectives of parents with children aged under five years. *BMC Public Health.* 2015;15:983. doi:10.1186/s12889-015-2252-x
4. Kurinsky RM, Rochette LM, Smith GA. Pediatric injuries associated with high chairs and chairs in the United States, 2003-2010. *Clin Pediatr (Phila).* 2014;53(4):372-379. doi:10.1177/0009922813510599