

Feeding Your Toddler



Toddlers are active, curious, and fun. Here are some tips for feeding your toddler.

- **Eat family meals together with the TV off.** Keep mealtime relaxing and fun. Meals together allow you to model healthy eating. Let your child see you eating breakfast and enjoying fruits and vegetables.
- **You decide what food to serve,** and where and when to serve meals and snacks. Let your child decide whether s/he is hungry and how much to eat. Don't make your child clean his plate.
- **Encourage your child to eat iron-rich foods** (such as meat, fish, poultry, beans, and iron fortified cereals) and foods that have vitamin C (such as fruits and vegetables), which helps the body absorb iron.
- **Children's appetites go up and down.** When your child is sick or teething s/he may not eat much. At other times, s/he may eat a lot.
- **Set regular meal and snack times.** This will help your toddler build up a healthy appetite at

mealtimes. An hour or two before meals, limit snacks and serve just water to your toddler.

- **Toddlers need small portions.** A good rule of thumb is to serve 1 tablespoon of a food for each year of age. For example, serve 3 tablespoons of peas for a 3-year-old. Let your child ask for more if s/he wants it.
- **Provide healthy choices for your child.** For example, offer an apple or a banana as a snack. Limit juice and sweets which can stick to teeth and cause tooth decay. Chips and fast food are not good for your child and can lead to unhealthy weight gain.
- **Avoid bribing or rewarding with food.** Give hugs and attention as rewards instead.
- **Avoid offering dessert as a reward** for finishing a meal. Rewarding with sweets may teach children to value sweets more than other foods.
- **Avoid foods that could cause choking:** whole nuts, grapes, hot dogs, popcorn, chunks of meat and firm/tough vegetables, peanut butter, and hard, chunky candy.
- **Toddlers can be messy eaters.** Your child is learning how to eat and needs practice. Reduce the mess by serving small portions, using large bibs, and keeping towels handy.

Frequently Asked Questions

My toddler is a fussy eater. What should I do?

It is common for toddlers to be picky eaters. Here are some key points to remember:

- Your child is growing more slowly than he did as a baby and may not have as much of an appetite.
- Your child is becoming more independent and may be saying no to many things, including food.
- Your child will learn to like new foods when he sees, smells, and (hopefully) tastes them over and over again. Be patient.
- Feed your toddler like the rest of the family; there is no need to make a special meal. He can eat most of the foods you eat, as long as they are soft and/or cut into small, easy to handle pieces.

What if my toddler will not eat vegetables?

First, keep serving vegetables. Show your child that you eat and enjoy them. Your child may like to dip vegetables rather than eating them plain. Second, remember that fruit has many of the same nutrients vegetables do. Serve a variety of fruits prepared in different ways.

What if my toddler will not drink milk?

Don't force your child to drink milk. Serve cheese, yogurt, and other foods made with milk, such as pudding and creamy soups. Add nonfat dry milk powder to yogurt, smoothies, and mashed potatoes.

Serve milk extra cold with ice, in a special cup, or with a special straw.

What are some healthy, portable snacks for toddlers?

Think of snacks as a chance to serve your child nutritious food, not just cookies or crackers. Plan ahead and keep a small cooler or lunchbox full of “to go” snacks. Choices could include:

- Fresh fruit like bananas, sliced pears, strawberries, or cups of applesauce or diced peaches
- Fresh vegetables like thin zucchini strips, diced cooked carrots, cucumber sticks, red bell pepper slices, etc.

- Cooked small pasta shapes such as shells or bowties, or cooked sweet potato, taro, etc.
- Half sandwiches on soft, whole grain bread
- Cheese with whole grain crackers
- Low-fat yogurt
- Whole grain cereals low in sugar

Healthy Habits

You can help your child have a healthy weight and strong body now and in the future. Serve a variety of healthy foods and make sure your child plays actively for an hour every day. Remember that the eating habits your child learns now are the

foundation for healthy habits later in life.

Resources

Websites

Kaiser Permanente: kp.org/nutrition
 American Academy of Pediatrics: healthychildren.org
 MyPlate: choosemyplate.gov

Books

Fearless Feeding-How to Raise Healthy Eaters from High Chair to High School, by Jill Castle and Mary Ann Jacobson, 2013

Suggested Daily Food Portions

Food Group	No. of Daily Servings	Serving Size	Healthy Ideas
Whole grains and starches	4 to 6	¼ slice of bread ½ cup cold cereal ¼ cup cooked pasta, hot cereal, rice or poi 2 to 3 crackers	Oatmeal, whole wheat bread, brown rice, corn or corn tortillas, whole wheat crackers, and whole grain cereals Other healthy options include poi, taro, sweet potato, green peas, corn and breadfruit.
Vegetables	2 to 3	1 to 2 tablespoons	Cook vegetables until they are soft and cut them up so toddlers can chew them. Offer orange vegetables such as carrots and squash. Serve green beans, cabbage, bok choy, broccoli, and green leafy vegetables like spinach.
Fruit	2	1 to 2 tablespoons or ¼ piece	Offer a variety. Include orange fruits such as papaya, mango, oranges, and peaches. Limit juice to no more than 4 to 6 ounces a day. Serve juice in a cup, not a bottle. Make sure the label says “100% whole fruit juice.”
Proteins	2 to 3	1 to 2 tablespoons meat, poultry, or fish, 3 tablespoons beans, 2 tablespoons peanut butter, 1 egg, ¼ cup tofu	Make meats easier to chew by cutting into small pieces. Offer ground beef or ground turkey. Serve hardboiled or scrambled eggs, chopped or mashed beans, bean or pea soup, tofu, hummus, and cottage cheese. Fish without bones is also a good choice.
Dairy or calcium rich	2	8 ounces of milk or soy milk (up to 24 ounces per day), 8 ounces cow or soy yogurt, 1 ½ to 2 ounces of cheese	Breastfeed for as long as you can. At 12 months, you can also serve whole cow’s milk or soy milk fortified with calcium and vitamin D. After age 2, switch to nonfat or low-fat (1%) milk. Always put milk in a cup. Wean your child from the bottle between 12 and 18 months.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your child’s physician or other health care professional. If your child has persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your child’s doctor.