

Feeding Your Toddler

If your child is between the ages of ~18 months and ~four years, he or she is considered a toddler. The toddler years are the best opportunity to lay the foundation for lifelong healthy eating habits. However, toddlers can complicate your efforts to do this by being unpredictable and constantly changing their likes and dislikes. Take heart, though - your job as a parent is just to provide nutritious food options for your child; it is your child's job to decide to eat them and, if so, how much.

Building Healthy Eating Habits

The chance of your child accepting new (and healthy) foods increases when there is a consistent structure to meal and snack times as well as consistency in your behaviors as a parent. It is important to establish regular meal times and snacks so your child can anticipate them instead of him or her getting into the habit of eating on-demand throughout the day with no schedule or limits.

Other Helpful Mealtime Tips

- Try not to eat on-the-go or in front of the television; choose a peaceful place in the kitchen to sit and have meal or snack time.
- Meal times should be kept to no longer than 30 minutes.
- Provide a balanced plate with a veggie, grain, fruit, and protein at meals.
- Never serve grains (i.e. crackers) by themselves. Grains are not a filling food when eaten alone.

Portions

- Plate and glass sizes influence portion and intake amounts. Use smaller dishes to help gauge portions and prevent overeating without overtly restricting intake.
- Offer nutritious foods and the child will decide if and how much to eat.
- Young people are usually in tune with their own hunger and will regulate intake appropriately when given a balanced diet. If this seems to be an issue for your child, contact your pediatrician or a registered dietitian who specializes in childhood nutrition.
- Do not make your child finish a plate if they indicate or tell you they are done.

Between Meals and Snacks

- Fill a “munch box” with cut up and ready to eat veggies for between meals and snacks. Only allow grazing between meals and snacking on veggies, not on anything else. It is important that children have scheduled meals and snacks and are allowed time in between to get hungry for food.
- Avoid excessive drinking before meals or children can lose their appetite for food at meals, which will cause them to miss out on important nutrition and development.



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Introducing New Foods

Beverage Guidelines

- After 12 months transition from a bottle to a sippy cup (remove suction insert in sippy cup to help toddlers develop proper motor skills for drinking).
- Between the ages of 12 to 24 months children should be given whole milk to drink. Only at two years of age should reduced fat milk (1-2%) be given.
- Do not introduce juice. Give mashed fruits or cut up fruits instead. If you chose to give your child 100% fruit juice, keep the amount to a maximum of ½ cup per day.

Food Guidelines

- It is now safe to have honey.
- You may now feel comfortable introducing cow's milk or other foods you have been withholding because of their allergenic potential (such as citrus fruits, eggs, fish, shellfish, nuts, and peanut butter). If allergies run in the family, some choose to delay their introduction even longer until two to three years of age. When you serve these foods, watch closely for any intolerance or allergic response, which can range from the development of a rash or itchy patch on the skin, respiratory problems, or abdominal discomfort to anaphylactic shock.

Cautions

- Because of the choking hazard they present, potentially dangerous foods to watch out for include sausage, hot dogs, nuts, grapes, raisins, beans, apple pieces, popcorn, round candy, marshmallows, hard chunks of cheese, and uncooked vegetables (especially carrots). Avoid all foods that are not able to be finely diced.
- To avoid burns, make sure that foods are cooled down enough before serving.
- Consider keeping your child away from chocolate, other desserts, and sodas until at least two years of age since a "sweet tooth" is easily obtained and restrained with difficulty. If a dessert (other than fruit or another healthful choice) is given, serve a small amount after a meal and do not offer sweets frequently or as snacks.
- **Do not put your child to bed with a bottle of milk or juice, as doing so would rot his or her teeth! If your toddler must have something to sleep, give only water.**

Activities for Toddlers

Active toddler playtime is an important part of staying healthy. Keep toddlers out of the stroller whenever possible and allow them to walk. Some fun activities for



toddlers include: playing outside, running in the yard, marching in follow-the-leader formation, jumping, skipping, throwing and bouncing balls, and riding tricycles. The less time spent watching TV, the better, so limit it to a maximum of one hour per day. For example, rather than playing a video to entertain your child while you clean the house, try giving him or her a job to “help” you; this will provide activity, teach motor skills, and help develop a good work ethic.

How much food should my toddler eat?

The amount of food that a child needs depends on his or her weight and activity level. However, a general guideline is five servings of grain/starch (1 ounce each), at least 1 ½ cups of vegetables, 1 ½ cups of fruit, 2 cups of milk/yogurt, and 4 ounces of meat/protein. Young toddlers often need only ¼ of the amount of typical adult portion sizes, while others may eat about half as much as an adult. A balanced diet is going to look differently depending on your child’s likes and dislikes.

Sample Day		
Meal	One Year Old (about 1,000 calories)	Three Years Old (about 1,400-1,500 calories)
Breakfast	1 slice whole wheat bread 1 Tbsp. ricotta cheese 3 Tbsp. mashed banana 4 oz. whole milk	1 slice whole wheat bread 1 Tbsp. peanut butter Thin slices banana on top 6 oz low-fat milk
Snack	2/3 cup applesauce ½ cup iron-fortified cereal 4 oz. whole milk	1 apple, cut into small pieces ½ cup dry, unsweetened cereal
Lunch	1 slice whole wheat bread 1 slice cheese ¼ cup cooked, mashed carrots 1 tsp. olive oil	2 slices whole wheat bread 1 slice cheese 1-2 leaves green lettuce 2/3 cup cooked, sliced carrots 1 teaspoon olive oil 8 whole wheat crackers
Snack	6 whole wheat crackers ¼ cup soft, mashed pear	1 soft, sliced pear 6 oz. low-fat milk
Dinner	¼ cup cut noodles 1 tsp. olive oil 2 Tbsp. sweet potato 3 Tbsp. cooked, mashed broccoli 2 Tbsp. chicken, moist and diced	2/3 cup whole wheat noodles 1 teaspoon olive oil ¾ cup steamed, cut broccoli 2 Tbsp. chicken, moist and diced ½ cup soft peach chunks
Snack	4 oz. whole yogurt	4 oz. low-fat yogurt + ½ cup berries

