

Eating Tips for Healthy Toddler Growth

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH MY TODDLER?

Toddlers can be a challenge and a joy to feed. Their growth slows after the first year, making their appetite voracious one day and nonexistent the next. Toddlers also begin to understand the power of “no” and may test it with food. Fear of new food, eating the same food over and over and picky eating are commonly seen during this stage of childhood.

During this stage, it's important to expose your toddler to a variety of nutritious foods, so he learns to eat a balanced diet. It's also important to meet nutrient requirements and transition to an eating routine.



WHAT NUTRIENTS ARE IMPORTANT FOR MY TODDLER?

All nutrients remain important for growth and development during the toddler years. Critical brain growth occurs through the first two years of life, making iron, fat and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) important considerations, while protein and zinc are top priority to help support body growth. By four years of age, calcium needs increase to that of an adult, while vitamin D requirements remain stable.

WHAT SHOULD MY TODDLER EAT?

Your toddler should be eating a variety of foods including protein foods, dairy products, grains, fruit, vegetables and healthy sources of fat.

FOOD GROUP	EXAMPLE
Protein	
Beef, Fish, Poultry	1-2 Tbsp
Egg	½ - 1
Beans, Cooked	1-2 Tbsp
Nuts, Seeds	¼ oz
Nut Butter	1-2 tsp
Dairy	
Milk, Yogurt	½ - ¾ cup
Cheese	½ oz
Grains	
Bread	½ - 1 med. slice
Pasta	2-5 Tbsp
Rice	2-5 Tbsp
Cooked Cereal	¼ - ½ cup
Fruit	
Strawberries	3-10 small
Pear	¼ - ¾ whole
Banana	¼ - 1 med.
Vegetable	
Whole, fresh	½ small
Raw, leafy greens	¼ - ½ cup
Cooked/canned	2-3 Tbsp
Fats	
Butter	1 tsp
Oil	1 tsp
Salad Dressing	1-2 tsp
Avocado	½ of med.

During toddlerhood, your child may become picky, particularly with fruits, vegetables and protein foods. Many children will eventually accept these foods if you are patient, positive, and offer them several times.

HOW SHOULD I FEED MY TODDLER?

Your job is to provide nutritious and balanced meals, create a positive eating environment, and respond appropriately to your child. Here are some suggestions to help you feed your toddler:

- Include your toddler at the family table as often as possible.
- Offer your toddler the family food, modified as needed (e.g., chopped) for safe eating.
- Transition to a predictable schedule of meals and snacks (e.g., breakfast at 7 am; snack at 9:30 am; lunch at noon, etc.).
- Offer a variety of foods from all food groups. Vary cooking methods, presentation, and flavor components. Repeated exposure without pressure to eat is the best way to encourage your toddler to taste and like new foods.
- Let your toddler decide between two food items (e.g., apple or banana, roast beef or turkey, cheese or yogurt), so he can contribute to decision making.
- Don't sweat it if your toddler refuses food. Stay positive and consistent with the meal you have planned and try again another time.
- Offer toddler-sized portions and avoid large servings of food.
- Serve a variety of colors, shapes and sizes of food to spark curiosity and interest.
- Let your toddler put food on his plate, use utensils and a cup so that he is encouraged to be independent with eating.
- Avoid making a separate meal for your toddler. Rather, plan meals and snacks with food variety in mind, accounting for one or two foods you know your toddler enjoys eating.
- Don't pressure your toddler to eat more or try a new food. Pressuring a child to eat often backfires, leading to food refusal.
- Avoid rewarding your toddler with treats for good behavior, or for eating nutritious food, as it may encourage unhealthy food preferences.



If you have questions about starting solid foods, consult with your physician or healthcare provider.



Tips are courtesy of Jill Castle, MS, RD, LDN, a registered dietitian/nutritionist in the field of pediatric nutrition for over 25 years. Formerly a clinical pediatric dietitian at Massachusetts General Hospital and Children's Hospital, Boston, Jill currently works as a private practitioner, online educator, consultant and speaker.

She is the author of *Eat Like a Champion: Performance Nutrition for Your Young Athlete*, co-author of *Fearless Feeding: How to Raise Healthy Eaters from High Chair to High School*, contributor to *Tough Love: Raising Confident, Kind, Resilient Kids*, creator of *The Nourished Child*, a childhood nutrition blog and podcast, and *The Kids Healthy Weight Project*, an online course for parents.

Jill speaks to a wide audience on topics including childhood nutrition, feeding, picky eating, youth sports nutrition and childhood obesity. Her expertise has been shared with the American Academy of Pediatrics, WIC, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and other organizations. As a pediatric nutrition consultant, she has partnered with corporations and organizations for product marketing, program development, education and social media endeavors.



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