

## Feeding a Healthy Toddler (12 to 36 months)

When your toddler eats well she will have the nutrients she needs to grow, learn and develop. You can teach your child to eat well by offering her healthy choices and by being a good role model. If you eat a variety of healthy foods and stay active, chances are that your toddler will too.

Encourage your toddler to eat well and be active by following the steps below.



### Steps you can take

1. Follow [Canada's Food Guide](#). It provides advice about the healthy foods that you can offer your toddler each day.

- | Focus on vegetables and fruit. Offer your child a variety of colourful vegetables and fruit.
- | Choose whole grains and higher fibre grain products.
- | Offer milk and milk products like yogurt and cheese. Serve 3.25% homogenized whole milk until 24 months after which you can switch to lower fat milk or milk alternatives.
- | Offer lean meats, poultry, eggs, dried beans, peas, lentils and tofu. Aim for 2 servings of fish per week. Nut butters can be included as long as they are thinly spread. Thickly spread nut butters are a choking risk.
- | Limit foods that are high in added sugar, salt and fat, such as cakes, cookies, sweetened cereal, ice cream, candy, chocolate, hot dogs, salted crackers, french fries/onion rings, cold cuts or canned soups. They will fill up your toddler and leave less room for healthier foods.

2. Offer healthy meals and snacks

- | Offer 3 small meals and up to 3 small snacks each day. Toddlers have small tummies that fill up quickly and need to eat more often.
- | Set regular times to eat. This will help your toddler develop a healthy routine.

- | For healthy meal and snack ideas, see the chart below.

### 3. Offer healthy beverages

- | Continue to breastfeed for the first two years and beyond.
- | If you are not breastfeeding, offer 500 mL (2 cups) of 3.25% homogenized whole milk each day with meals and snacks. Do not give her more than 750 mL (3 cups). 3.25% homogenized whole milk is an important source of energy and essential nutrients for your toddler.
- | If you are breastfeeding, you can still offer 3.25% homogenized whole milk at meals and snacks. However, she may not need to drink 500 mL each day depending on how often you breastfeed. Milk provides energy and essential nutrients. If you have any questions about balancing breast milk and cow's milk speak to your health care provider.
- | You can switch to a lower fat milk or fortified soy beverage once your toddler is 24 months old.
- | Provide water between meals if your toddler is thirsty.
- | Offer fruit instead of juice. It has more nutrients and fibre.
- | Limit juice to 125-175 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$  cup) each day. Avoid sugary beverages called "fruit cocktail", "fruit punch" or "drink" and soda pop. They are high in sugar.
- | Offer beverages in a regular cup, not a bottle or a "sippy cup".

### 4. Trust your toddler's appetite

- | Let your toddler decide on how much she wants to eat. Your job is to offer healthy choices to her. It's normal for her appetite to vary from day to day. Appetite can vary depending where she is eating (for example, at home or at day care or if your toddler is growing, physically active, tired or sick.)
- | Don't pressure your toddler to eat. This may cause the opposite effect and she may not eat well.
- | If you are concerned about your toddler's growth or appetite, see your health care provider.

### 5. Keep meal times pleasant and relaxed

- | Eat as a family as often as possible. Whenever you can, offer your

toddler the same foods as the rest of the family. You are an important role model. When she sees you eating the same food as she is eating, she will be more likely to imitate you and try new foods.

- | Enjoy meal times at the table without distractions such as the TV, phones, computer, radio and toys. This will help you and your toddler to focus on eating.
- | Let your toddler feed herself. Don't be upset if she is messy or if food ends up on the floor. She is learning and exploring how to feed herself.
- | Don't be discouraged if she does not like a food on the first try. It can take about 15 tastes before she may like a new food. Keep offering foods that she has refused in a variety of different ways. For example, try carrots, cooked, grated, in carrot muffins, shepherd's pie, etc.

## 6. Healthy meal and snack ideas

Try these meal and snack ideas to get you started:

### Healthy meal ideas\*

- | Cut up meatballs in tomato sauce with pasta and squash
- | Scrambled eggs, strips of whole grain toast with diced melon
- | Whole wheat pita with thinly spread smooth nut butter, diced banana and 3.25% homogenized whole milk
- | Brown rice with ground beef, cooked and chopped bok choy and carrots
- | Tuna sandwich with tomato and apple slices
- | Baked sweet potato with shredded chicken, cooked broccoli florets and melted cheese
- | Congee or rice porridge with small pieces of meat, chicken, or fish with cut up mandarin orange slices
- | Whole wheat chapatti with channa (chickpea curry), cooked vegetables and plain yogurt

### Healthy snack ideas\*

- | Steamed edamame (green soy bean pods), peas and corn with cubed cheese
- | Sliced strawberries and pineapple with yogurt dip
- | Cubed cheese with sliced plums and pears
- | Strips of whole grain bread or toast with avocado or thinly spread smooth nut butter
- | Yogurt and small oatmeal muffin
- | Hummus (chickpea dip) with soft cooked zucchini strips and cauliflower florets
- | O-shaped oat cereal or brown rice puffs with yogurt and fresh cut berries
- | Black bean dip with whole grain crackers or roti

\*To lower the risk of choking choose the right texture of food for your toddler. For more information see the additional resources section.

## 7. Be active with your toddler

Toddlers need to be physically active every day for proper growth and development, and to have a healthy weight.

Be active *with* your toddler and give her playtime both indoors and outdoors. Aim for at least 180 minutes of physical activity a day. Run, jump, dance or play catch or tag with your toddler to help her develop basic movement skills. Limit the time she spends in front of the TV and computer. Keep her active during the day by letting her play on her own and with other children.

## Special Considerations

### Vitamin D

- | Breastfed toddlers should be given a vitamin D supplement of 400 IU/day until they are two years old.
- | To help your toddler get enough vitamin D:
  - | Offer 500-750 mL (2-3 cups) of cow's milk each day. You can

offer fortified soy beverage once she is over 24 months.

- | Offer other good food sources of vitamin D like fish, egg yolk, margarine and some yogurts.
- | If your toddler is not drinking milk or vitamin D fortified milk alternatives, give them a supplement of 400 IU of vitamin D.
- | Speak to your health care provider if you think your toddler may not be getting enough vitamin D.



## Additional Resources

- | Increasing Your Child's Iron Intake  
<https://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=RbCR&id=JMLnUAQ=&PreviewHandout=bA==>
- | Tips for Feeding Your Picky Toddler or Preschooler  
<https://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=RbCR&id=JMDqXwE=&PreviewHandout=bA==>
- | Healthy Eating Guidelines for Choosing Fish Low in Mercury  
<http://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=UbY=&id=JMznXQO=&PreviewHandout=bA==>
- | Food Sources of Vitamin D  
<https://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=RbCR&id=JMbqWAI=&PreviewHandout=bA==>

*These resources are provided as sources of additional information believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publication and should not be considered an endorsement of any information, service, product or company.*



## Notes

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