

Helping Toddlers (1 to 2 years) to Eat Well

The toddler years are an important time to continue to introduce healthy foods and to be a good role model for your child. When your child reaches one year you may notice changes in eating behaviour such as:

- Decreased appetite.
- Eating different amounts of food from day to day.
- Changing food preferences (textures, tastes and colours).
- Increased need for independence and a desire to learn to eat by themselves.

Feeding children requires a division of responsibility:

PARENTS decide **what, when** and **where** the food is served

CHILDREN decide **whether** and **how much** to eat



Where to serve food:

- Eat meals at the table as a family whenever possible.
- Make mealtimes a social time. Talk about the day's events.
- Create a pleasant environment for meals: remove toys and other distractions.

Parents or Caregivers

What food to serve:

- For meals, aim for foods from three to four food groups. For snacks, aim for foods from at least two food groups.
- Try new food: offer a small amount first and offer other foods your child usually likes. Remember, it may take between ten to fifteen times before a new food is accepted.
- Serve food in the form that is manageable for children. Eating with their hands is OK. Expect a mess. Making a mess is just part of learning how to eat.

When to serve food:

- Set regular time for meals and snacks (usually three meals and two to three snacks per day).
- Don't rush toddlers when eating: children take longer than adults to eat. However, after a reasonable time if the child is not eating, remove uneaten food. Twenty to thirty minutes is usually enough time for a toddler to eat.
- Offer food and drink at meals and snacks only, not in between. If they are thirsty between meals, offer water.

Children

Whether to eat:

- Occasionally it is okay if your toddler does not eat a meal or snack. Respect toddlers if they say "no" to food, it is their way of having choice and learning independence.
- Never force or punish a toddler for refusing to eat. As adults, we are not always hungry for food.
- Do not bribe toddlers to finish their meals by offering them dessert. Offer attention and affection as a reward instead of food.

How much to eat:

- Toddlers need to develop their own sense of when they are full and determine when they are finished eating.
- Some days toddlers may eat often, while other days, they may not be hungry and may not eat very much. This is normal.
- Never pressure toddlers to "finish" their drink or their meal. Remove uneaten food without commenting.
- Toddler portion sizes tend to be smaller than adult portion sizes. Toddlers have smaller stomachs and need to eat smaller amounts more often throughout the day.

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Canada's Food Guide for Toddlers (1 to 2 years)

Don't worry about amounts. Provide small serving sizes to start and offer more if your child eats the entire portion. Let your toddler decide how much to eat.

Food Group	Suggested Serving Sizes	Examples of Toddler Menu Choices
Grain Products Offer at least half of the grain products as whole grain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1/4 - 1/2 slice bread • 1/8 - 1/4 bagel, pita or tortilla • 5 - 15 g cold cereal • 15 - 60 mL (1 - 4 tbsp) cooked pasta, rice, bulgur or couscous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain bread, muffin, bagel or tortilla • Whole grain cereals without a sugar coating (no need for additional sugar). Sweeten naturally with dried, fresh or frozen fruit • Cooked cereals, pasta, rice, bulgur or couscous
Vegetables and Fruit Offer at least one dark green and one orange vegetable or fruit each day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1/4 - 1/2 medium vegetables or fruit • 15 - 60 mL (1 - 4 tbsp) cooked vegetables or fruit, or grated or chopped raw vegetables or fruit • 30 - 60 mL (2 tbsp - 1/4 cup or 1 - 2 oz) 100% juice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh cooked, stewed or mashed fruit • 100% real fruit juices • Raw or cooked vegetables, especially dark green and orange ones
Milk and Alternatives Toddlers need two cups (500 ml) of homogenized (3.25% M.F.) milk per day to ensure that their Vitamin D needs are met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60 - 125 mL (1/4 - 1/2 cup or 2 - 4 oz) homo (3.25% M.F.) milk • 15 - 25 g (1/2 - 1 oz) cheese • 30 - 100 g (2 tbsp - 1/2 cup) yogurt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole (homogenized) milk as a beverage or in puddings, soups, plain yogurt • Cheese (block or processed) or cottage cheese • Yogurt <p>Note: soy milk is not recommended for children under the age of 2</p>
Meat and Alternatives Offer leaner meats, poultry and fish, as well as dried peas, beans and lentils and tofu more often Offer fish at least two times a week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 - 35 g (1 - 4 tbsp or 1/4 - 1 1/4 oz) cooked fish, poultry or lean meat • 15 - 100 mL (1 tbsp - 1/2 cup) tofu or cooked beans or lentils • 1/4 - 1 egg • 5 - 15 mL (1 tsp - 1 tbsp) peanut butter or other nut butters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground, chopped or cubed lean meats, fish or poultry • Eggs • Mashed legumes (peas, beans, lentils) • Tofu
Other Foods		Limit foods high in salt, fat, sugar and caffeine. These include snack foods such as potato chips, chocolate, candies and pop

Frequently Asked Questions

When can I introduce soy milk to my child?

Soy milk should not be offered to children until after two years of age. Soy milk, rice milk or other vegetarian beverages do not have enough fat and may not have vitamin D added to them.

What foods might cause choking?

Young children can choke easily. Always stay with your child when she is eating. Do not give your child foods that are hard, small and round such as nuts, popcorn, whole grapes or hard vegetables. Do not give your child smooth and sticky foods.

My toddler never eats a full Food Guide serving. Is this a problem?

For toddlers under 2 years old, there is no recommended number of servings for each food group. Let your child decide how much to eat. Never pressure your toddler to eat more than he wants. Do not restrict the amount you give her to eat when she seems hungry. It is normal for young children to eat different amounts of food each day.

You could start with offering half a Food Guide serving, for example, half a cup of milk, half a slice of bread, 1 oz. meat, and gradually work up to a full serving.

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