

Feeding Your Child

A Guide to Your Child's Nutritional Needs



The Toddler/Preschooler Ages 1 to 5



The Toddler/Preschooler: Ages 1 to 5

The young toddler will begin to show signs of independence particularly with eating. For some toddlers, this independent phase will come gradually between 12 and 18 months and for others it will come almost overnight. Though the pace is different, the end result is the same: your baby is getting older and is ready to begin feeding themselves. The self-feeding process will be gradual and messy so be patient. You can encourage self-feeding by offering foods that can easily be grasped with the thumb and forefinger such as chunks of banana, dry cereal (ex. Cheerios), soft-cooked vegetables or sliced cheese.

Food Jags

As toddlers become older, they begin to separate from their parents and form their own identity. Odd meal choices and food rituals, referred to as “food jags,” are a normal part of this process.

Toddlers may use different techniques for exercising self-control in their struggle for autonomy such as:

- Demanding a peanut butter and jelly sandwich at every meal.
- Going on a cereal binge.
- Refusing to use a spoon.
- Insisting on eating from a special plate.



Studies have shown that toddlers who eat more on some days and less on others will actually eat a balanced diet over the week, even though the diet does not appear balanced on a daily basis.

This independent phase is sometimes tough to endure but remember that it will eventually pass.

- **Don't get upset** or try to make your child eat certain foods—this may set the stage for long-lasting power struggles.
- **Continue to offer healthy foods at each meal**, even if you expect your child will not eat them.
- **Leave foods simple.** Studies have shown that toddlers have a more acute sense of taste than adults because their taste buds are less weathered. This is why young children often do not like combination foods like casseroles or foods with sauces.

Health care providers and nutritionists feel 2-5 year olds can eat the same healthy, balanced diet as the rest of the family. Just remember, your child is not an adult in kids' clothing!

Tiny Tummies Hold Less

A young child's stomach is only about the size of their fist. This is why small, but frequent feedings work best. To ensure your child is meeting their daily nutritional requirements:

- Make sure your child's snacks are healthy foods from the basic food groups.
- Minimize sugary, processed foods at meals and snacks and offer whole, minimally processed foods.
- Serve milk or water towards the end of a meal or snack to help ensure your toddler is getting a good balance of nutrients. Toddlers often fill up on beverages, leaving no room for a wider variety of foods. Aim for about 2 cups (16 ounces) of milk daily. If you have questions about which type of milk is appropriate for your child, check with your healthcare provider or registered dietitian nutritionist.
- Limit juice to 0-4 ounces per day. Children should be encouraged to eat whole fruits which have more nutrients and fiber than fruit juice.



Helpful Feeding Information for Your Toddler

The following are suggestions to help manage mealtimes so that your toddler gets the nutrition they need:

- **Do not enforce the clean plate club.** Threats and punishments only reinforce the power struggle. Don't appear overly concerned about what does and does not get eaten.
- **Provide healthy meals and snacks.** It is the parents' responsibility to provide healthy food at mealtime and snack time. It is the child's responsibility to determine how much of it to eat. Be sure to offer balanced meals and snacks that contain nutrient dense carbohydrates, quality protein and healthy fats.
- **Be patient and flexible with food acceptance.** Toddlers are often afraid of new things. Introduce new food in a neutral manner. Talk about the food's color, shape, size, smell and texture—but not about whether it tastes good. *Children often need several exposures to a new food before they accept it, so be persistent.*
- **To make foods easy for your toddler to eat:**
 - ◆ Cut food into bite-sized pieces.
 - ◆ Make foods soft and moist.
 - ◆ Serve foods near room temperature.
 - ◆ Use ground meat instead of steak or chops.
 - ◆ Use a child-sized spoon and fork with dull prongs.
 - ◆ Seat your child at a comfortable height in a secure chair.
- **Minimize sugary foods at meals and snacks.** This will help children be more likely to choose healthy foods when they are hungry.

- **To prevent your toddler from choking:**
 - ◆ Slowly add more difficult-to-chew foods.
 - ◆ Avoid foods that are hard to chew and/or swallow such as nuts, nut butter (by itself), raw carrots, gum drops and jelly beans.
 - ◆ Modify high-risk foods: cut hot dogs or grapes in quarters, cook carrots until soft, etc.
 - ◆ Avoid eating in the car. If your child starts choking it's hard to get to the side of the road safely.
 - ◆ Always supervise your child while eating.
 - ◆ Keep your child seated while eating.



Foods Most Likely to Cause Choking

 Raisins	 Nuts
 Whole grapes	 Peas
 Corn	 Hard candy
 Raw cherries with pits	 Raw apples
 Hot dog slices	 Raw celery
 Spoon of nut butter	 Chunks of meat
 Popcorn	 Whole round carrot slices

Helpful Feeding Information for Your Preschooler

Preschool-aged children (ages 4 to 5) are still developing their eating habits and need encouragement to eat healthy meals and snacks. They are eager to learn, especially from other people, and will often imitate eating behaviors of adults. They need supervision at mealtime as they are still working on their chewing and swallowing skills.

The following are some helpful hints for preschool-aged children:

- **Provide regularly scheduled meals and snacks.** Limit unplanned eating.
- **Keep offering a wide variety of foods.** Sooner or later, your child will learn to eat most foods.
- **Make mealtime as pleasant as possible.** Don't put pressure on your child to eat or force your child to clean their plate. This may lead to overeating and the development of poor eating habits later on.
- **Provide examples of healthy eating habits.** Be aware that preschoolers often mimic what they see their parents eating.
- **Involve your child in the selection and preparation of foods.** Teach them to make healthy choices based on their nutritional value.

Healthy Lifestyle Choices

- Parents should model healthy lifestyle habits to their children. Children whose parents eat healthy and exercise regularly are more likely to develop into healthy adolescents and young adults.
- Children need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily for good health and fitness. Replace sedentary activities with activities that require more movement.
- Limit children’s video, television, computer and tablet use to less than 1-2 hours daily. Create “screen-free” zones in your house where there are no electronic devices.

What Counts as a Serving?

Offer children age-appropriate servings from each food group daily. **Portion sizes vary with age and from child to child.** Younger children often eat smaller portions. Offering smaller servings and allowing them to ask for more satisfies their hunger, does not waste food and allows them to stay in tune with their hunger and fullness cues.

A good rule of thumb for estimating serving sizes for children is 1 Tablespoon per year of age. For example, serve a 2 year old 2 Tablespoons of vegetables to start and offer a 4 year old 4 Tablespoons or ¼ cup.

Suggested Age-Appropriate Serving Sizes for Common Foods

Ages 1 to 2	Cooked or chopped fruits	¼ cup
	Mashed and lightly steamed vegetables	¼ cup
	Cooked grains, rice, and pasta	¼ to ½ cup
	Bread	½ slice
	Cooked meat, poultry, fish and beans	1 ounce
	Whole milk	½ cup
Ages 2 to 5	Fresh fruit	½ piece
	Cooked fruits and vegetables	¼ to ½ cup
	Cooked grains, rice, and pasta	⅓ to ½ cup
	Bread	1 slice
	Meat, poultry, fish and beans	1 to 2 ounces
	Milk—whole or reduced fat	½ to 1 cup

Reminder About Vitamin D

Children 1 year and older should receive a supplement of **600 IU** of vitamin D3 daily unless they are consuming it through food.

Daily Food Plan – Use as a General Guide

These suggestions are based on average needs. Do not be concerned if your child does not eat the exact amounts suggested. Your child may need more or less than average (for example, needs increase during growth spurts). Children’s appetites vary from day to day. Some days they may eat less than the amounts listed and other days they may want more. Start by offering these amounts and let your child decide how much to eat.

Food Group	1 year old	2 year old	3 year old	4 to 5 years old	What counts as:
Non-Starchy Vegetables Try to eat more dark-green, red and orange vegetables	¾ cup	1 cup	1 ½ cups	1 ½ - 2 cups	½ cup of vegetables? ½ cup mashed, sliced or chopped vegetables 1 cup raw leafy greens ½ cup unsweetened vegetable juice
Fruits Color your plate with a variety of whole fruits	1 cup	1 cup	1 - 1 ½ cups	1 - 1 ½ cups	½ cup of fruit? ½ cup mashed, sliced or chopped fruit ¼ cup dried fruit (no added sugar) ½ medium banana 4-5 large strawberries
Nutrient Dense Carbohydrates Choose minimally processed, intact grains	2 ounces	3 ounces	4 - 5 ounces	4 - 5 ounces	1 ounce of grains? 1 slice of bread 1 cup ready-to-eat cereal flakes 1 tortilla (6 inches across) ½ cup cooked rice, quinoa or pasta
Protein Vary your protein foods	1 ½ ounces	2 ounces	3 - 4 ounces	3 - 5 ounces	1 ounce of protein? 1 ounce of cooked meat, poultry or seafood 1 egg ¼ cup cooked beans, lentils or peas 1 Tablespoon natural nut butter
Dairy Choose unsweetened milk and yogurt	2 cups	2 cups	2 cups	2 - 2 ½ cups	½ cup of dairy? ½ cup milk 4 ounces of yogurt ¾ ounce cheese 1 string cheese
Healthy Fats Include quality fats, avoiding partially hydrogenated oils	unrestricted	35 - 40 grams or 7 - 8 teaspoons	35 - 40 grams or 7 - 8 teaspoons	35 - 55 grams or 7 - 11 teaspoons	5 grams or 1 teaspoon of healthy fat? 1 teaspoon oil, butter or ghee 8 large black olives 1 Tablespoon natural nut butter ¼ cup avocado

Sources

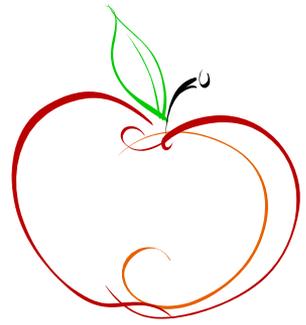
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Ward, Elizabeth MS RD, *Serve Up Good Nutrition for Preschool Children*, WebMD.

Food Jags, MedlinePlus.

Choosemyplate.gov/children, USDA.

Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense, Ellyn Satter, MS, RD.



Resources for Parents of Toddlers and Preschoolers

Fearless Feeding: How to Raise Healthy Eaters from High Chair to High School

[Jill Castle, MS, RD & Maryann Jacobsen, MS, RDN](#)

This comprehensive nutrition guide gives parents the tools for encouraging kids of any age on the path to healthy eating as well as understanding and improving any child's eating habits.

Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family: How to Eat, How to Raise Good Eaters, How to Cook

[Ellyn Satter, MS, RD](#)

More a cooking primer than a cookbook, this book encourages movement back to the family table and provides simple, delicious recipes, ways to involve kids in the kitchen and guidelines for adapting menus for young children.

How to Raise a Mindful Eater

[Maryann Jacobsen, MS, RD](#)

This is a step-by-step guide on how to nurture your child's emerging relationship with food. It pinpoints 8 Powerful Principles that give you the best shot at raising a mindful eater—someone who listens to their body, eats for nourishment and enjoyment and naturally eats in moderation.

Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense

[Ellyn Satter, MS, RD](#)

Confused about feeding your baby or toddler? This book is an essential guide for every parent concerned with nutrition and appetite with thorough and straightforward advice.