

Let's Talk About...

Nutrition for toddlers

As a caregiver or parent, you are the most important influence on your child. You can do many things to help your child develop healthy eating habits for life. Below are guidelines to help your toddler develop healthy eating habits and grow and develop normally.

How do I set a positive mealtime routine for my child?

As a parent or caregiver, you can set a positive mealtime routine by:

- Always offer meals away from distractions like toys and TV.
- Plan and provide 3 meals and 1–2 snacks a day. Here is an example of meal and snack times:
 - Breakfast: 8 AM
 - Lunch: 11 AM
 - Snack: 2 PM
 - Dinner: 5 PM
 - Snack: 8 PM



- Do not offer food or drink between meal and snack times.
- Allow enough time for your child to finish the meal (20 minutes) or snack (10 minutes). If your child plays and doesn't eat, remove the food and say, "It looks like you're not hungry." The meal is over until the next meal or snack time.

How much should my child drink at each meal?

Allowing your child to have drinks during each mealtime routine will help them get the right amount of liquids. You can make sure your child is drinking the right amount and the right types by:

- Offer milk at all meals (Average amount of milk for a toddler is 4–6 ounces per meal)
- No more than 2–4 ounces of juice per day
- Avoid giving your child fruit punch, flavored drinks such as Kool-Aid® or Gatorade®, soda, or other sugary drinks. These drinks have few nutrients.

How do I make mealtime more pleasant?

You can encourage an enjoyable mealtime by:

- Making food easy and safe for your child to eat
 - Avoid foods that can cause choking such as whole grapes, meat chunks, hot dogs, whole nuts, peanut butter unless spread thin, popcorn, raisins unless cooked, raw apples, raw vegetables, gumdrops, hard candy, and jelly beans
- Eating together as a family as often as possible
- Modeling good behavior at the table
- Avoiding talk about:
 - How much your child eats
 - What your child eats
 - What your child has eaten before

- Letting children feed themselves
 - As much as possible
 - Place a plastic sheet under the high chair or table to catch any mess
 - Wipe your child's mouth and clean up only when the meal or snack is over
- Avoid coaxing, begging, bribing, rewarding, force-feeding, or play games to get your child to eat
- Avoid offering other foods if your child refuses to eat
- Avoid acting concerned over what your child eats or does not eat

How do I help my child eat what I prepare at mealtimes?

Your child will learn to eat what you make for meals if you keep a consistent meal routine and set limits. Avoid being controlling and making your child:

- Stay at the table to eat their vegetables
- Clean their plate at each meal
- Eat everything before they can have dessert
- Eat only three meals a day

You should also avoid:

- Giving your child a snack whenever they want one
- Letting your child behave badly at the table
- Regularly giving your child special food
- Preparing whatever food your child asks for
- Giving your child juice or milk whenever they want it

What are some food guidelines and menus?

If your child is underweight for their height:

- Give them whole milk at meals and snack times
- Add butter or margarine to breads and crackers
- Dip cooked veggies in ranch dressing or bananas in full fat yogurt



If your child is overweight for their height:

- Give your child 1% or skim milk at meals and water at other times
- Avoid juice, soda, punches, and sport drinks
- Use less butter and margarine and give your child low-fat dressings
- Encourage your child to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables

All children older than 2 years old who are growing appropriately can safely drink 1% or skim milk. See the sample menu for meal and snack ideas.

Where can I find more resources about toddler nutrition?

If you worry about your child's growth or weight, contact your child's healthcare provider or a dietitian. Helpful resources about toddler nutrition include:

- **How to Get Your Kid to Eat... but Not Too Much** by *Ellyn Satter*
- **Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense** by *Ellyn Satter*
- EllynSatterInstitute.org
- ChooseMyPlate.gov
- EatRight.org/kids
- FruitsandVeggiesMoreMatters.org
- HealthyChildren.org

Sample Menu for Toddlers

Ages 1–3 years

Breakfast

Option 1

- ½ cup oatmeal
- ½ banana chopped
- ½ cup milk

Option 2

- 1 egg scrambled
- ½–1 slice whole wheat toast with butter
- ¼ cup applesauce
- ½ cup milk

Lunch

Option 1

- ½ tuna fish sandwich (made with whole wheat bread) chopped
- ¼ cup chopped cucumber
- 1 chopped kiwi fruit
- ½ cup milk

Option 2

- ¼ cup refried beans
- 1-ounce shredded cheese
- ½ cup cooked and chopped carrots
- ½ orange chopped
- ½ cup milk

Afternoon Snack

Option 1

- ½ cup chopped pear
- ½ cup vanilla yogurt
- water

Option 2

- 1 cheese stick, sliced lengthwise and chopped
- 1/3 cup quartered red or green grapes
- water

Dinner

Option 1

- ¼ whole wheat pasta
- ¼ cup meat marinara sauce
- ¼ cup cooked broccoli
- ¼ cup chopped orange
- ½ cup milk

Option 2

- 1-2 ounces chicken, finely chopped
- ¼ cup brown rice
- ¼ cup cooked green beans
- ¼ cup chopped fruit
- ½ cup milk

Evening Snack

Option 1

- ¼ cup canned garbanzo beans
- ¼ cup blueberries
- ½ cup milk

Option 2

- 2 graham crackers
- 1 Tbsp. peanut butter spread thinly
- ½ cup milk

Notes

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