

# Eating Tips for Healthy Toddler Growth

## WHAT'S GOING ON WITH MY TODDLER?

Toddlers (1-3 years old) can be a challenge and a joy to feed. Their growth slows after the first year, making their appetite voracious one day and non-existent the next. Toddlers also begin to understand the power of “no” and may test it with food. Fear of new food, food jags (eating the same foods) and picky eating are commonly seen during this stage of childhood.

## GOALS

During this stage it's important to expose toddlers to a variety of nutritious foods so they learn to eat a balanced diet. It's also important to meet nutrient requirements and transition to an eating routine.



## WHAT NUTRIENTS ARE IMPORTANT FOR TODDLERS?

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 body growth keeps protein and zinc top priority nutrients. By four years of age, calcium needs increase to that of an adult, while vitamin D requirements are stable.

## WHAT SHOULD MY TODDLER EAT?

Toddlers should be eating a variety of foods including protein sources, dairy products, fruits, vegetables, grains and healthy sources of fat.

During toddlerhood, children 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. Follow a daily feeding pattern similar to the foods listed in the chart below to provide the calories, protein, vitamins and minerals your toddler needs for healthy growth.

FOOD GROUP	ONE SERVING =	SERVINGS/CALORIES (PER DAY)
<b>Grains</b>		6 servings Per Day = 250 Calories
Bread	¼ to ½ slice	
Cereal, rice, pasta (cooked)	4 Tbsp	
Cereal (dry)	¼ cup	
Crackers	1 to 2	
<b>Vegetables</b>	1 Tbsp/year of age	2-3 Servings Per Day = 75 Calories
<b>Fruit</b>		2-3 Servings Per Day = 75 Calories
Fruit (cooked or canned)	¼ cup	
Fruit (fresh)	½ piece	
Juice	¼ to ½ cup (2-4 oz)	
<b>Dairy</b>		2-3 Servings Per Day = 300-450 Calories
Milk	½ cup	
Cheese	½ oz (1-inch cube)	
Yogurt	⅓ cup	
<b>Protein</b>		2 Servings Per Day = 200 Calories
Beef, Fish, Poultry, Tofu	2 Tbsp	
Egg	½ (yolk and white)	
<b>Legumes</b>		2 Servings Per Day = 200 Calories
(Dried) Beans, Peas, Lentils	2 Tbsp (⅓ cup) Soaked and cooked	
<b>Peanut Butter</b>		1 Serving Per Day = 95 Calories
(Spread thin on bread, toast or cracker)	1 Tbsp	

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## 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. Research consistently supports the value and importance of family meals.
- Offer your toddler the family food, modified as needed (e.g., chopped) for safe eating.
- Avoid making a separate meal for your toddler. Rather, plan meals and snacks with food variety in mind, including one or two foods you know your toddler enjoys 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.
- 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.
- Don't sweat it if your toddler refuses food. Stay positive and consistent with the meal you have planned and try again another time.
- 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.



Visit [www.BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com](http://www.BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com) for more research on beef's role as a complementary food.



Tips are courtesy of Jill Castle, MS, RD, LDN who has practiced as 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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