

# FACTSHEET

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## Healthy eating for toddlers

Toddlers like to show their independence by making their own decisions. This can be seen at mealtimes as well as other times in the day.

Parents of toddlers often worry about how much their child is eating. The most important thing is that you give your child the right types of food at the right times; the rest is up to your child. Try to relax and enjoy this time of development.

A child's growth slows down after 12 months of age, and this can lead to your child wanting less food, because less food is needed for their growth. Toddlers need small, regular meals and snacks. They need to be offered a variety of different foods each day. Give your child foods that the rest of the family eats. They will be able to try a variety of different foods, textures and tastes, which all help to develop enjoyment of food. Children watch others, and learn from people around them, so remember that parents and other family members are important role models.

Please see this link for serving sizes and tips on healthy eating for kids:

[https://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/81769/Web\\_lady\\_gowrie\\_booklet.pdf](https://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/81769/Web_lady_gowrie_booklet.pdf)

### Nutrition tips

Toddlers are not small adults and do not need the same quantity of food that adults do. Expect them to eat much smaller serve sizes than older children, adolescents and adults. They also eat different amounts of food from day to day and meal to meal.

- If your child is growing and gaining weight well, you can be sure that they are getting enough energy (calories/kilojoules), even if you think they are not eating much food.
- As a parent or carer, you are responsible for **WHAT**, **WHEN** and **WHERE** they eat. Your toddler can decide whether they are hungry: so they should decide **HOW MUCH** or **WHETHER** they eat at all. Toddlers control their energy intake over a day or even over a week, so if they don't eat much at one meal or have a "bad day", they will usually make up for it at a later time. Do not force your child to eat as this can reduce their natural ability to know when they are hungry and when they are full.
- Toddlers need 3 meals and 2-3 snacks at regular times each day. Avoid letting your child "graze" or eat all day, as they will never really feel full or hungry. Meals and snacks should not take too long (maximum 30mins). Try to take away distractions at these times such as television, toys, phones and devices.
- Water and milk are the best drinks for your toddler. Offer your child drinks from a cup. Bottle use is not recommended after 1 year of age.
- Full cream milk is recommended up to 2 years of age. If your child is growing well, a change to reduced fat milk is appropriate from 2 years. Cow's milk should be offered in a cup, not a bottle.

- See table below for the recommended serves of milk and dairy products. It is important that toddlers eat a variety of nutritious foods. Limit the amount of milk to 500mls a day and only give milk after food, not before.
- Cordials, fruit juices and soft drinks are high in sugar and have little nutrition. Avoid giving them to your toddler as they may take the place of nutritious foods or lead to tooth decay, toddler diarrhoea, excess weight gain or poor growth. Caffeinated and carbonated drinks are not recommended.
- Have healthy snacks available for snack times. Some examples are fruit, yoghurt, fruit toast, milk, baked beans, a cheese stick, dried fruit, cheese and crackers. See Factsheet "[Healthy Snack Choices](#)" for more ideas.
- Teach your children about healthy eating by involving them in growing or preparing food. If your child has helped grow the vegetables or make the meal, they are more likely to eat it and enjoy it.
- Do not use food as bribery or reward. If you need a reward, use other things such as playing their favourite game, reading a book, visiting a friend's house or going to the local park to play.
- Give your toddler some choice with food, but keep choices very simple. For example "Would you like pear or banana to have with your yoghurt"? Or "Would you like cheese or tuna on your sandwich?" Avoid giving too many choices or asking open-ended questions such as "What would you like?" as this will confuse toddlers.
- If you are worried about fussy eating or your toddler refusing food, please read the "Managing Toddler Mealtimes" factsheet for ideas.

## Sources of further information

### Websites:

#### The Sydney Children's Hospital Network

<http://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/fact-sheets>

#### Women's and Children's Hospital (South Australia)

[http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/services/az/other/nutrition/documents/Tucker\\_for\\_Toddlers\\_Edition2\\_2014.pdf](http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/services/az/other/nutrition/documents/Tucker_for_Toddlers_Edition2_2014.pdf)

#### Raising Children Network

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/nutrition-fitness>

#### Better Health Channel

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

Click on healthy eating and food fact sheets. Several factsheets available under healthy eating tips.

#### Ellyn Satter Associates (US site)

<https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/>

#### Dietitians Association of Australia

[www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)

#### Baylor College of Medicine: Children's Nutrition Research Centre (US site)

<http://www.bcm.edu/cnrc/>

#### [Growing Good Habits: Queensland Health Australia](https://www.growinggoodhabits.health.qld.gov.au/)

<https://www.growinggoodhabits.health.qld.gov.au/>

### Books:

#### **Kids Food Health 2 – from toddler to preschool.**

Dr Patricia McVeagh & Eve Reed, 2001.

#### **Child of Mine- Feeding with Love and Good Sense.**

Ellyn Satter, 2000

**Positive Food for Kids.** Dr Jenny O'Dea, 2005.

## Serves and serving sizes

Food group	Serves per day for 2-3 year olds	Examples: 1 serve =
Vegetables and legumes/beans	2½	½ cup cooked vegetables 1 cup salad vegetables ½ cup cooked beans/lentils ½ medium potato
Fruit	1	1 medium apple, banana, orange, pear, mandarin 2 small apricots, kiwifruits, plums
Breads, cereals and grains	4	1 slice bread ½ bread roll or flat bread ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, couscous, noodles, polenta, semolina, quinoa ½ cup cooked porridge 1 crumpet 2/3 cup wholegrain cereal ¼ cup muesli 3 crispbreads
Meat and protein	1	65g cooked lean meat (e.g. beef, lamb, veal, pork, goat, kangaroo) 80g cooked chicken or turkey 100g cooked fish 2 large eggs 1 cup cooked/canned legumes (e.g. chickpeas, kidney beans, baked beans) 170g tofu 30g nuts, seeds or nut paste (e.g. peanut butter)
Dairy foods	1½	1 cup reduced fat milk 2 slices (40g) cheese 200g (¾ cup) yoghurt ½ cup ricotta cheese
Fats & oils	1	1 teaspoon margarine or plant-based oil (e.g. olive oil, canola oil)

(Based on NHMRC recommendations)

[www.nhmrc.gov.au/files/nhmrc/publications/attachments/n55f\\_children\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files/nhmrc/publications/attachments/n55f_children_brochure.pdf)