



Feeding toddlers: What and how much to offer

Toddlers seem to have endless energy as they explore and learn about the world around them. Offering a variety of healthy foods will give them a chance to learn about foods and get what their bodies need to grow, play, and learn. Unsure about what or how much to serve? Keep reading.

What kinds of foods should be offered? Toddlers need a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein food, and dairy or fortified soy alternatives.

- Focus on fresh, frozen, canned, or dried whole fruits instead of juice.
- Vary the color and texture of veggies. Offer raw and cooked veggies of different colors of the rainbow. Veggies can be prepared from fresh, frozen, canned, or dried then served whole, cut-up, or mashed.
- Make half of grains whole grains. Offer oatmeal, brown rice, bulgur, or breads, cereals, and pasta made from whole grain flours.
- Vary the protein options. Offer eggs, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, soy products, and lean meat and poultry.
- Move to low-fat or fat-free milk or yogurt (dairy or fortified soy). Once kids turn two, it is time to make the switch to lower fat products.

Should any foods be avoided? Limit food and drink with added sugars and sodium. These types of food are full of energy but lack important nutrients to support kids' growth. This means limiting things like soda, sugary cereals, cookies, pre-made pizza, chicken nuggets, boxed mac and cheese, and chips.

How much should be served? The recommendations for how much toddlers need to eat depends on their age, height, weight, physical activity level, and whether they are male or female. A toddler's appetite will influence how much they eat each day. No worries if they eat more one day and less another. The goal is that things balance out over a week's time.

Your job is to offer foods from each food group each day. For snacks, offer foods from two groups. For meals, offer foods from three or more groups.

Recommendations for what to serve each day:

- Fruits: 1 – 1 ½ cups
 - Offer about ¼ cup at a time
- Vegetables: 1 – 2 cups
 - Offer about ¼ cup at a time
- Grains: 1.5 – 3-ounce equivalents

- Offer ½ ounce equivalent at a time – half a slice of sandwich bread, half a cup of dry cereal, or a 3-inch pancake.
- Protein: 2 – 5-ounce equivalents
 - Offer about 1 ounce equivalent at a time – one egg, ¼ cup of chopped chicken or beef, ¼ cup of cooked beans, peas, or lentils
- Dairy or fortified soy alternatives: 2 – 2.5 cups
 - Offer about ½ cup at a time

Toddler’s bellies are smaller than adults. Keep serving sizes small to start. You can always ask if they want more.

References

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- Healthy Eating Research. (2021). *Ages 2 – 8 Feeding Recommendations*. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Retrieved October 22, 2021 <https://healthyeatingresearch.org/tips-for-families/ages-2-8-feeding-recommendations/>

Source: Courtney Luecking, Extension Specialist for Nutrition and Health

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