

# FACTSHEET

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## Healthy eating for toddlers

Toddlers are rapidly developing and 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 your child is provided with the right types of food at the right times; the rest is up to your child. Try to relax and enjoy this time of important development.

Growth slows down after 12 months of age, and this may result in a smaller appetite because less food is needed for growth. Toddlers need small regular meals and snacks. They need to be offered a variety of different foods each day. Allow your child to eat 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 your child's 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:

[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)

### 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.

- 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 has the ability to determine whether they are hungry: so they should decide HOW MUCH or WHETHER they eat at all. Toddlers regulate their energy intake over a day or even over a week, so even 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. Research has shown that children who are forced to eat lose their ability to know when they are full, which is a risk for the development of obesity later in life.
- Toddlers need 3 meals and 2-3 snacks per day. Avoid "grazing" or allowing your child to 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 and toys.
- 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.

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- See table below for appropriate portions of milk and dairy products. It is important that toddlers eat nutritious foods; be mindful of limiting milk to 600mls a day and offering it after food where possible.
- Cordials, fruit juices and soft drinks are high in sugar and contain minimal nutrition. They may take the place of nutritious foods, lead to dental caries and can cause toddler diarrhoea, excess weight gain or poor growth.
- 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 “Snack Attack Ideas” for more ideas.
- Teach your children about healthy eating by involving them in preparing food. If your child has helped prepare the meal, they are more likely to eat it as they feel proud of their achievement.
- Do not use food as bribery or reward. If you need a reward, use other things such as the chance to play their favourite game, read a book, visiting a friend’s house or going to the local park to play.
- Allow your toddler to have 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?” Giving too many choices, or asking an open-ended question such as “What would you like?” leads to confusion at this age.
- If you are concerned about fussy eating or food refusal, please refer to the “Managing Toddler Mealtimes” factsheet for suggestions.

## Sources of further information

### Websites:

#### The Children’s Hospital at Westmead

[www.chw.edu.au/parents/factsheets/](http://www.chw.edu.au/parents/factsheets/)

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

[www.wch.sa.gov.au/services/az/other/nutrition/documents/Tucker\\_for\\_Toddlers08.pdf](http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/services/az/other/nutrition/documents/Tucker_for_Toddlers08.pdf)

#### Raising Children Network

[www.raisingchildren.net.au/nutrition\\_fitness/toddlers\\_nutrition.html](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/nutrition_fitness/toddlers_nutrition.html)

#### 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)

[www.ellynsatter.com](http://www.ellynsatter.com)

#### 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/>

### Books:

**Food for under fives – How to develop good eating patterns for your child.** Rosemary Stanton, 1999.

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

Dr Patricia McVeagh & Eve Reed, 2001.

**A Healthy Start for Kids – building good eating patterns for life.** Susan Thompson, 1995.

**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 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 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)