



Feeding Your Toddler

Your toddler is learning that she is a separate person from you. It's normal for her to want to "do it herself" and that can make eating a struggle. But your toddler still needs you as much as ever. In order to help her to continue to grow, offer your toddler three meals a day plus two to three nutritious snacks. It's important to make sure the portions are right for her size.

Follow the golden rules of feeding toddlers:

- Parents decide the what, when and where of feeding.
- Your child decides how much and whether or not to eat.

Tips for Good Eating Behavior

Preparing for Mealtime

- **Sit down at a table to eat meals and snacks.** Have meals and snacks two to three hours apart, with only water in between eating times. This way, your toddler will come to the table ready to eat. She will feel hungry, but not too hungry, tired or cranky.
- **Arrange for a quiet time before meals** to help your child pay attention to eating.
- **Seat your child** in a high chair, booster seat or children's table.

During Meals and Snacks

Feeding Environment

- **Eat at a table as a family** as often as possible.
- **Avoid distractions** like TV, video games or radio so your child can pay attention to eating.
- **Give your child her own small fork and spoon.** Cut food into bite-size pieces or serve soft finger foods. Children often enjoy feeding themselves.
- **Give your child enough time to enjoy the meal (20 to 30 minutes.)** If your child is finished earlier or starts acting up, excuse her from the table.
- **Take your child's food away when she loses interest in eating** (if she stops eating, pushes the food away or starts throwing food).

Your Toddler's Plate

- **Offer two to three foods** at each meal.
- **Give your child small servings.** A serving is about a tablespoon for every year of age and for every food. For example, a 3-year-old might eat three tablespoons of brown rice, three tablespoons of broccoli and three tablespoons of chicken.
- **Give your child some kinds of food she's had before and some new ones.** It is normal for your child not to want new foods. Just give her this new food again another time. It can take many tries before a child will accept a new kind of food.
- **Wait for your child to ask for seconds before giving her more.** Children know when they are done! Allow them to practice this at an early age.
- **Never force or pressure your toddler to eat or finish** a certain amount of food.
- **Do not give your child something else to eat if she isn't eating what you serve.** Good nutrition can add up over several days. Remember: As a parent, you decide what your child eats and your child decides whether to eat it. It gets better over time!
- **Choose whole fruit over juice.** Your child doesn't need juice in order to be healthy. But if you do to give juice, only give her 4 to 6 ounces a day. You can try mixing it with water.

Setting Limits and Giving Praise

- **Your child will learn how to behave by eating with you** and your family at the table.
- **Praise your child for good eating behavior,** but don't make her the center of attention.
- **Do not punish your child if she refuses to eat.** Instead, take your child away from the table and do not offer other food until the next meal/snack time, except for water. Remember, she will get enough nutrition over the next few days.
- **Do not reward or bribe your child with food.** For example, do not say, "If you eat your broccoli, you can have ice cream." This teaches her that some foods are better than others.
- Accept that feeding a toddler is messy. She is still learning to eat!

Family Education Sheet • Feeding Your Toddler

Eating Healthfully: A Daily Food Guide

Offer your child foods from the following food groups every day:

Food Group	Total Amount/Day	Serving Size and Food Sources
Milk and milk substitutes	Four servings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ½ cup of milk or unsweetened calcium-fortified soy milk• ½ cup yogurt, 1 oz. cheese, ¼ cup shredded cheese
Meat, fish, poultry, peanut butter and cooked or dried beans and other protein foods	Two to three servings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A serving is the same as 1 egg; 1 slice of cheese; ½ cup of cooked beans or lentils; 2 tablespoons peanut butter; 1 slice turkey or lean meats; 2 slices of luncheon meat; 1 hotdog; 1 slice small cheese pizza; ¼ cup cottage cheese; ¼ cup tuna; ½ cup tofu; 1 soy burger patty; ¼ chicken breast, wing or thigh
Grains: breads, cereals, rice, pasta and other starches	Four servings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A serving is the same as ½ slice of bread; ½ <i>small</i> bagel; ½ English muffin; ½ roll; three crackers; ½ hamburger or hotdog bun; ¼ cup cooked rice or pasta; ¼ cup oatmeal, ½ ounce ready-to-eat cereal, unsweetened• Aim for 100% whole grains with more than three grams of fiber and low added sugar.
Fruits	Two servings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A serving is the same as ½ piece fresh fruit or ¼ - ½ cup of canned or frozen fruit. (oranges, berries, melon, apricots, nectarines, peaches, tangerines, banana)
Vegetables	Three servings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A serving is the same as ¼ cup of fresh, frozen or canned vegetables (tomatoes, peppers, cabbage, spinach, carrots, peas, quash, sweet potatoes, broccoli)
Fats and Oils	Three servings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A serving is 1 teaspoon of oil, nuts, seeds or dressing.

Resources

- *Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense*, by Ellyn Satter, R.D.
- *How to Get Your Kid to Eat ... But Not Too Much* by Ellyn Satter, R.D.
- American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org
- American Dietetic Association Website: www.eatright.org

How do I make a nutrition appointment at Boston Children's Hospital?

To make a nutrition appointment, please call 617-355-6177.

Please note: This Family Education Sheet is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses and treatment, talk with your doctor and/or dietitian.

This Family Education Sheet is available in **Arabic** and **Spanish**.

Meal Time Strategies:

Offer 3 food items per meal:

- 1) Something they like
- 2) Something hit or miss
- 3) Something new or non-preferred

Try to mirror your own meal as much as possible, and try to offer 3 different food groups.

The goal is to get your child to become more comfortable interacting with item 3. *Do not pressure them to eat the whole thing!*

Ask them to:

- Smell
- Touch
- Kiss
- Lick
- Nibble
- Bite

The new food, working up the hierarchy as tolerated. You should expect them to complete each step 5-10 times before moving to the next step. Kids need to try a new food 8-10 times before deciding whether they like it or not!

Use language like, “you are still getting used to this food”, “It’s so _____ (crunchy, soft, melty, crisp, dry, etc)”. Avoid enforcing negative statements.