



HEALTH  
DEPARTMENT

# Feeding a Healthy Toddler

(12 to 36 months)



When your toddler eats well, they will have the nutrients they need to grow, learn, and develop. You can teach your child to eat well by offering them healthy choices and by being a good role model. If you eat a variety of healthy foods and stay active, chances are your toddler will too.

Encourage your toddler to eat well and be active by following the steps below.

## Steps you can take

### 1. Follow Canada's Food Guide (CFG)\*.

It provides advice about the healthy foods that you can offer your toddler each day.

- Focus on vegetables and fruit. Offer your child a variety of colourful vegetables and fruit.
- Choose whole grains and higher fibre grain products.
- Offer milk and milk products like yogurt and cheese. Serve 3.25% homogenized whole milk until 24 months after which you can switch to lower fat milk or milk alternatives.
- Offer lean meats, poultry, eggs, dried beans, peas, lentils, and tofu. Aim for 2 servings of fish per week. Nut butters can be included if they are thinly spread. Thickly spread nut butters are a choking risk.
- Limit foods that are high in added sugar, salt, and fat, such as cakes, cookies, sweetened cereal, ice cream, candy, chocolate, hot dogs, salted crackers, french fries/onion rings, cold cuts, or canned soups. They will fill up your toddler and leave less room for healthier foods.





## 2. Offer healthy meals and snacks

- Offer 3 small meals and up to 3 small snacks each day. Toddlers have small tummies that fill up quickly and need to eat more often.
- Set regular times to eat. This will help your toddler develop a healthy routine.
- For healthy meal and snack ideas, see Step 6.

## 3. Offer healthy beverages

- Continue to breastfeed for the first two years and beyond.
- If you are not breastfeeding, offer 500 mL (2 cups) of 3.25% homogenized whole milk each day with meals and snacks. Do not give your toddler more than 750 mL (3 cups). 3.25% homogenized whole milk is an important source of energy and essential nutrients for your toddler.
- If you are breastfeeding, you can still offer 3.25% homogenized whole milk at meals and snacks. However, your toddler may not need to drink 500 mL each day depending on how often you breastfeed. Milk provides energy and essential nutrients. If you have any questions about balancing breast milk and cow's milk speak to your health care provider.
- You can switch to a lower fat milk or fortified soy beverage once your toddler is 24 months old.
- Provide water between meals if your toddler is thirsty.
- Offer fruit instead of juice. It has more nutrients and fibre.

## 4. Trust your toddler's appetite

- Let your toddler decide on how much to eat. Your job is to offer healthy choices. It's normal for your toddler's appetite to vary from day to day.
- Appetite can vary depending on where your toddler is eating (for example, at home or at day care) or if your toddler is growing, physically active, tired, or sick.
- Don't pressure your toddler to eat. This may cause the opposite effect and your toddler may not eat well.
- If you are concerned about your toddler's growth or appetite, see your health care provider.

## 5. Keep meal times pleasant and relaxed

- Eat as a family as often as possible. Whenever you can, offer your toddler the same foods as the rest of the family. You are an important role model. When your toddler sees you eating the same food as your toddler is eating, they will be more likely to imitate you and try new foods.
- Enjoy mealtimes at the table without distractions such as the TV, phones, computer, radio, and toys. This will help you and your toddler to focus on eating.
- Let your toddler feed themselves. Don't be upset if your toddler is messy or if food ends up on the floor. Your toddler is learning and exploring how to feed themselves.
- Don't be discouraged if your toddler does not like a food on the first try. It can take about 15 tastes before maybe liking a new food. Keep offering foods that they have refused in a variety of different ways. For example, try carrots, cooked, grated, in carrot muffins, shepherds pie, etc.

## 6. Healthy meal and snack ideas

Try these meal and snack ideas to get you started:

### Healthy meal ideas

- Cut up meatballs in tomato sauce with pasta and squash
- Scrambled eggs, strips of whole grain toast with diced melon
- Whole wheat pita with thinly spread smooth nut butter, diced banana and 3.25% homogenized whole milk
- Brown rice with ground beef, cooked and chopped bok choy and carrots
- Tuna sandwich with tomato and apple slices
- Baked sweet potato with shredded chicken, cooked broccoli florets and melted cheese
- Congee or rice porridge with small pieces of meat, chicken, or fish with cut up mandarin orange slices
- Whole wheat chapatti with channa (chickpea curry), cooked vegetables and plain yogurt

### Healthy snack ideas

- Steamed edamame (green soybean pods), peas and corn with cubed cheese
- Sliced strawberries and pineapple with yogurt dip
- Cubed cheese with sliced plums and pears

- Strips of whole grain bread or toast with avocado or thinly spread smooth nut butter
- Yogurt and small oatmeal muffin
- Hummus (chickpea dip) with soft, cooked zucchini strips and cauliflower florets
- O-shaped oat cereal or brown rice puffs with yogurt and fresh cut berries
- Black bean dip with whole grain crackers or roti

## 7. Be active with your toddler

Toddlers need to be physically active every day for proper growth and development, and to have a healthy weight.

Be active with your toddler and give your toddler playtime both indoors and outdoors. Aim for at least 180 minutes of physical activity a day. Run, jump, dance or play catch or tag with your toddler to help them develop basic movement skills. Limit the time they spend in front of the TV and computer. Keep them active during the day by letting your toddler play on their own and with other children.





## Special Considerations

### Vitamin D

- Breastfed toddlers should be given a vitamin D supplement of 400 IU/day until they are two years old.
- To help your toddler get enough vitamin D:
  - Offer 500-750 mL (2-3 cups) of cow's milk each day. You can offer fortified soy beverage once your toddler is over 24 months.
  - Offer other good food sources of vitamin D like fish, egg yolk, margarine and some yogurts.

- If your toddler is not drinking milk or vitamin D fortified milk alternatives, give them a supplement of 400 IU of vitamin D.
- Speak to your health care provider if you think your toddler may not be getting enough vitamin D.

\*<https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

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Durham Health Connection Line  
905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729

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