

How Much Should My Toddler Eat?

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Parents are often concerned whether or not their child ate enough at a meal or throughout the course of a day. They want to know that they are meeting the needs of their growing child. A parent's role in feeding their child involves many steps.

General guidelines for feeding your toddler

- First, it is the parent's responsibility to decide which foods to serve and to serve the correct portion size. Remember portion sizes for toddlers are a lot smaller than portion sizes for adults. Hopefully the meals will be healthy and balanced, reflective of the parent's own diet. Even preschool-aged children eat more when large portions of highly palatable foods are offered. Providing parents with some guidelines for age-appropriate portions may be helpful.
- It is your child's job to determine how much to eat of the correct portion you serve. Some may choose not to eat at all and that is OK! Research reveals that 99% of children are very good at listening to their own hunger and satiety cues. Trust them on this skill.
- Lastly, remember to reinforce the importance of regular meal times and healthy food choices. Good eating habits are formed early in life.

Daily servings for toddlers

- Fruit 3-4 servings a day: fruit- 1/2 to 1 small fruit, 2 to 4 tbsp canned fruit
- Vegetables- 3 servings a day: 2 to 3 tbsp cooked vegetables
- Dairy- 4 to 5 servings a day: dairy- 1/2 cup milk (whole milk for 2 years or younger) per serving or 1/2 cup yogurt
- Protein- 2 servings a day: 1 to 2 oz meat, 1 egg per serving, or 4 to 5 tbsp cooked legumes
- Grain products- 3 to 4 servings a day: 1/2 to 1 slice of whole grain bread; 1/4 to 1/2 cups rice or pasta, preferably whole grain like brown rice, whole wheat pasta or quinoa pasta, or 1/2 cup to 1 cup dry low sugar cereal, 1/4 to 1/2 bagel, 1/2 to 1 whole wheat or corn tortilla

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Sometimes a parent will say that their child doesn't like certain types of foods and will stop offering them in favor of some convenience foods which are higher in sodium, sugar and refined flours. Children catch on fast and they know when to cry, whine or charm their way into a certain food selection. This teaches the child they are in charge of determining the choice of food. Instead, parents can provide nutritious meals and healthy snacks and let the child eat or not eat the amount of the food offered. Children often need to be exposed to the same food many times before it is accepted. Model behaviors that are nutritious and the child will be sure to follow. This will assist the child in building healthy meal habits for life.

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