

## Feeding your toddler: 1 to 3 years



Feeding your toddler can be very exciting. They learn to eat lots of new foods. But it can also be stressful. Toddlers may want to make their own choices at mealtimes. They may refuse some foods or not eat at all. You can help them enjoy eating by following the tips in this teaching sheet.

### What is my role as a caregiver?

- Decide when meals and snacks happen
- Choose the food
- Offer food at a table and eat with your toddler

### What is my toddler's role?

- Decide how much to eat from what is offered
- Decide whether to eat or not to eat at all

### How can I help my toddler during mealtime?

When offering food, caregivers should feed in a way that allows them to respond to their child. This is called responsive feeding. **Responsive feeding means:**

- Remove distractions when eating. Turn off all devices.
- Sit with your child and eat with them. Talk to your child and listen.
- Start by serving 1 to 2 tablespoons of each food at the meal. When your child is able to tell you, let them help decide what's on their plate. Let them choose from the foods served.
- If your child finishes a food on their plate, let them have more of that food. It is ok if they do not finish all of their foods before getting more of another.
- Let them eat fast or slow. Allow your child to eat as much or as little as they want. They can eat with a spoon or with fingers.
- Do not bribe your child with dessert or a toy to get them to eat.
- Give one warning to stop throwing food or acting out. End the meal if it continues after the warning.
- Give them lots of chances to try new foods at different meals on different days.
- Trust them when they say they are done. Put away the food when the meal is over.

### Feeding tips:

- Seat your toddler in a high chair or booster seat. Have them facing toward you or another caregiver.
- Plan the meal to include at least one food your toddler usually likes.
- Have meals at about the same times each day. Give snacks at set times. Offer food every 2 ½ to 3 hours. If your toddler refuses to eat at these times, they can try again at the next meal or snack.
- Don't wait for your toddler to say "I'm hungry" before you offer meals and snacks.
- Only give water between meal and snack times.
- Offer milk only with meals or snacks. Put the milk away after the meal or snack is over.

## What should I offer my toddler?

- Offer your child a few foods from each food group daily.
- Start to wean your child from the bottle around one year. Keep breastfeeding for as long as you and your child desire. Start to breastfeed at regular times instead of on-demand. To help them be hungry for foods, do not breastfeed your toddler right before a scheduled meal or snack.
- After your child's first birthday, you may switch to whole milk. It may take your toddler a while to get used to its taste, but keep offering it. After age 2, you may switch to low fat milk.
- Don't worry if your child is a picky eater or does not want to try a new food right away. This is common and does not last forever. A child who is growing well and eating from each food group is likely getting enough to eat. Talk to your child's healthcare provider if you are having a hard time feeding your child or think your child is not eating enough.

**How much food should I offer?** How much your toddler eats at each meal and snack will change a lot. Use this table to help guide you.

Food Group	Serving Size	Offer
<b>Fruit</b> Canned, fresh or frozen food that has been thawed	2 to 3 tablespoons of cut up fruit	Offer 2 to 4 times each day
<b>Vegetable</b> Soft, cooked	2 to 3 tablespoons of cut up vegetables	Offer 2 to 4 times each day
<b>Dairy</b> Milk Yogurt Cheese	1/2 cup 1/2 cup 1/2 ounce	Offer 4 times each day
<b>Grains</b> Bread Cooked Cereal Dry Cereal Rice, noodles, pasta	1/2 slice 1/4 to 1/3 cup 1/4 to 1/2 cup 1/4 to 1/3 cup	Offer 3 to 5 times each day
<b>Protein</b> Meat, chicken, turkey, fish Dry beans Eggs Peanut Butter	1/2 to 1 ounce 1/3 cup, cooked 1/2 to 1 each 1 tablespoon	Offer 2 to 4 times each day

**Do not give:** nuts, whole grapes, raw hard vegetables, or hard candy. Do not offer hot dogs unless sliced and each slice is cut into four pieces. These items can cause your child to choke.

**Be careful** with dried fruit, chips, popcorn, peanut butter, pretzels. They can be hard to chew and swallow.



**For other health and wellness information, check out this resource:**

<https://kidshealth.org/ChildrensWi/en/parents>

**This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.**