

## Meeting Your Toddler's Nutritional Needs

The following is a summary of the daily requirements for a one- to three-year-old:

### What to eat:

1. Protein: A minimum of 16 grams a day. 16 ounces of milk plus one ounce of meat is ample protein for a toddler.
2. Fat: At least 30 percent of a toddler's calories should come from fat. Too little can result in "failure to thrive" where children do not get enough food to supply their energy and growth needs.
3. Calories: 40 calories/day/inch of height = 1000 to 1300 calories/day.

Calorie distribution is apt to look like this:

16 g Protein = 64 calories  
44 g Fat = 396 calories  
210 g Carbohydrate = 840 calories  
Total = 1300 calories

4. Sodium: 325 to 1000 mg.
5. Vitamin C: 40 mg.
6. Vitamin A: 400 ug RE
7. **Calcium:** 800 mg. If a child drinks the recommended 2 cups of milk a day he still needs 200 more milligrams of calcium. Offer yogurt, cheese, tofu, and leafy greens.
8. **Iron:** 10 mg.
9. **Zinc:** 10 mg. A mild zinc deficiency is more common than realized in toddlers. Symptoms are poor appetite, suboptimal growth and reduced sense of taste and smell. The best sources are meat, eggs and seafood.
10. **Folate:** 50 mg

The last four are nutrients showing up as the most frequent nutritional inadequacies of toddlers.

These specific nutritional needs translate into the following guidelines for feeding a toddler:  
Every day serve:

- **2 to 3 cups of milk** (milk can take many forms like yogurt, cheese, pudding) Some children are not good milk drinkers and must rely on other foods for their protein. Conversely, other toddlers drink milk to the exclusion of other foods, resulting in deficiencies of iron or other nutrients.
- **4 servings of fruits and vegetables** (one tablespoon per year of age is the rule for serving size) One serving should be high in Vitamin C and one should be high in vitamin A.
- **4 servings of bread and cereal**, although toddlers are apt to eat more in this department. This is okay so long as it doesn't lead to the exclusion of some other food group. One

serving should be of an iron fortified baby cereal. A serving size is about 1/4 to 1/3 an adult portion. e.g 1/4 slice toast, 1/4 cup pasta

- **2 servings of meat**, beans, eggs, tofu. A good serving of protein should be fed at every meal. One serving equals 1 /2 ounce.

A meal should provide protein, bread or cereal, fruit or vegetable or both, and milk.

As you can see, toddlers need remarkably little food. A typical meal may consist of 1 1/2 cup milk, 1/4 slice toast, a few bites of scrambled egg, and a tablespoon of applesauce. It doesn't look like much. But toddlers are small and they are not growing too quickly. So, it's not surprising the most common concern of toddler's parents is "My child doesn't eat enough, especially vegetables." The second most common concern is "My child is a very picky eater. She'll only eat a limited number of foods."

### **How to get them to eat it:**

Toddlers are notoriously picky eaters. They only accept a few foods. Why is it that your toddler will eat only macaroni and cheese but a two-year-old in Mexico will accept a tortilla wrapped around beans? Obviously children are capable of learning to like and accept a wide variety of foods. But why won't your toddler? Rest assured, that Mexican child would probably find the idea of macaroni and cheese disgusting.

Kids learn to accept foods in a social and cultural context. Impacting that acceptance are some inherent characteristics of toddlers.

Research has shown that a couple of factors are primary determinants of a child's preference for food. Not surprisingly, one is an unlearned liking for sweet taste. The second determinant is **familiarity**. Familiarity is unrelated to any characteristic about that food, such as smell or taste or texture. Toddlers simply prefer the foods that are familiar to them, thus the beans and tortillas in Mexico, and the Mac and Cheese in the U.S. This characteristic has earned themselves the label neophobic. Neophobia is the fear of the new and unknown. For toddlers, that's a reluctance to try new foods.

Neophobia makes sense when viewed as a normal, adaptive response. Rather than reflecting a lack of cooperation, it may be a young organism's mechanism for avoiding unfamiliar, potentially toxic foods. A 'cave baby' may soon die if he is willing to try every berry he could get his hands on. Likewise, your child may refuse the food gifts of a stranger ... a healthy response!. Once you recognize food 'negativity' as an adaptive response you can take the necessary steps to get your toddler to accept new foods in spite of it. Increasing his variety of liked foods is your goal since a wider variety is more apt to ensure an adequate nutrient intake.

Initial rejection of a new food by your child shouldn't be interpreted as reflecting a fixed and persistent dislike of the food. He needs many more chances to give the food a try. Only after several exposures will he learn the food is safe to eat. When after several occasions of tasting the food in which it is not followed by something negative ... like nausea or vomiting, he learns the

food is okay. However, even one experience of lousy gastrointestinal consequences can cause a long-term rejection of a food.

Knowing this, your most successful tactic for offering new foods would be a schedule that includes a couple of opportunities a week to sample the new food. Do not coerce your child to eat it, but set up the expectation you expect him to at least taste it. Always allow him to spit it out if he wants. The policy of at least tasting the new food is important to establish in late infancy before the strong sense of autonomy and independence of the toddler age takes hold. Although just being around the food does help, only tasting it leads to ultimate acceptance. Never force him to eat it though. That approach, although maybe successful in the present, will backfire in the long run.

Equally as important as offering the new food often, is the atmosphere under which it is offered. In our culture we have a few accepted feeding practices which have unintended effects on toddler's food preferences. For example, dessert (usually sweet) comes at the end of a meal and is often used as a reward for "eating your vegetables" or is withheld as a punishment when they aren't. This has the effect of making the restricted food (in this case, dessert) more highly desired. According to Dr. Leann Birch, the strategy of having a child eat a food to obtain a reward tends to reduce the child's liking for the food he has to eat to obtain the reward; The same thing occurs if he has to 'drink his milk' before he can watch TV, or eating his egg before going out to play. But, you really don't want your toddler eating dessert if he hasn't eaten his dinner. How do you deal with this? First of all, rethink what you're serving for dessert. For most people, sweets are palatable even when full. This may be why a non-hungry toddler is still willing to eat the bowl of ice cream when he's not hungry for dinner. Try making dessert a food you feel good about your toddler eating, irregardless of what he has or has not eaten ahead of time. The dessert should make a positive nutritional contribution to the meal. Instead of icecream, serve a pudding made with skim milk, like rice pudding. Serve fruit salad or a fruit and yogurt 'sundae' instead of pie. If it's cookies, make them whole grain oatmeal. Allow them to eat dessert first if they want

Because of their small size and slow growth a toddler's appetite is small. There will be plenty of times when he's just not hungry. It's important not to make a fuss if he refuses to eat. He'll eat when he's hungry and the more you force, the stronger he refuses. A toddler's eating is erratic and unpredictable but viewed over several days his intake will meet his daily average needs. Therefore, don't worry if on some days he refuses to eat anything, it will be made up for elsewhere.

Coping with picky, erratic eating can be exasperating even in light of your intellectual approach to it. To help deal with it, understand your role well and know you have carried it out the best you can. Your job is to offer a wide variety of wholesome foods in a non-pressured supportive setting, on a regular, predictable schedule. Other little things you can do to help encourage your toddler to eat are:

- present new foods at least twice a week
- offer new foods along with old favorites
- serve small, toddler size portions, too much on the plate can make him feel overwhelmed
- foods should be easy to chew, toddlers can't chew tough things

- food should be bite size
- toddlers like colorful foods
- try changing the venue of his meals- serve lunch in the playhouse, snack as an afternoon tea party
- toddlers enjoy playing with their food, it is a part of learning about it, within reason allow this to happen
- let them help in food preparation
- grow a vegetable garden
- make food attractive, arrange food in the shape of an animal, a face, etc.
- offer limited choices. e.g ask "Do you want orange juice or apple juice?" instead of "What do you want to drink?"
- eat as a family as much as possible. Kids learn by imitating what they see.
- help ensure that they come to the table hungry, don't use food to cure boredom or as a pacifier.

Toddlers need snacks to get them through the day Because they eat so little they have no room for calories without nutrients. Make sure the snacks you serve aren't "empty calories" Keep your pantry full of healthful snacks. Pack some along when you go out.

Here are some pack-along snack ideas for those toddlers on the go:

- bananas
- small boxes of favorite cereals
- Fig Newtons
- whole wheat, low salt pretzels
- homemade mini muffins (keep a supply in your freezer)
- mini-bagels
- cheese cubes
- rice cakes
- small juice boxes
- whole grain granola bars
- zip lock bags of toddler made gorp (let him decide what to mix in!)