



Nutrition Guide for Toddlers

Nutrition Through Variety

Growth slows somewhat during the toddler years, but nutrition is still a top priority. It's also a time for parents to shift gears, leaving bottles behind and moving into a new era where kids will eat and drink more independently.

The toddler years are a time of transition, especially between 12–24 months, when they're learning to eat table food and accepting new tastes and textures. Breast milk and formula were perfect for your child as an infant, but now it's time for toddlers to start getting what they need through a variety of foods.

How Much Food Do They Need?

Depending on their age, size, and activity level, toddlers need about 1,000–1,400 calories a day. Refer to the chart below to get an idea of how much your child should be eating and what kinds of foods would satisfy the requirements.

Use the chart as a guide, but trust your own judgment and a toddler's cues to tell if he or she is satisfied and getting adequate nutrition. Nutrition is all about averages so don't panic if you don't hit every mark every day — just try to provide a wide variety of nutrients in your child's diet.

The amounts provided are based on the MyPlate food guide for the average 2- and 3-year-old. For kids between 12 and 24 months, the recommendations for 2-year-olds can serve as a guide. But during this year, toddler diets are still in transition. Younger toddlers may not be eating this much — at least at first. Talk with your doctor about specifics for your child.

When a range of amounts is given, the higher amount applies to kids who are older, bigger, or more active and need more calories:

Food Group	Daily Amount for 2-Year-Olds	Daily Amount for 3-Year-Olds	Help With Servings
Grains	3 ounces, half from whole-grain sources	4-5 ounces, half from whole-grain sources	1 ounce equals: 1 slice of bread, 1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal, or ½ cup of cooked rice, cooked pasta, or cooked cereal.
Vegetables	1 cup	1½ cups	Use measuring cups to check amounts. Serve veggies that are soft, cut in small pieces, and well cooked to prevent choking.
Fruits	1 cup	1-1½ cups	Use measuring cups to check amounts.
Milk	2 cups	2 cups	1 cup equals: 1 cup of milk or yogurt, 1½ ounces of natural cheese, or 2 ounces of processed cheese.
Meat & Beans	2 ounces	3-4 ounces	1 ounce equals: 1 ounce of meat, poultry or fish, ¼ cup cooked

dry beans, or 1 egg.

Milk Matters

Milk is an important part of a toddler's diet. It provides calcium and vitamin D to help build strong bones. Toddlers should have 700 milligrams of calcium and 600 IU (International Units) of vitamin D (which aids in calcium absorption) a day. This calcium need is met if kids get the recommended two servings of dairy foods every day. But those servings provide less than half of the necessary vitamin D, so doctors often recommend vitamin D supplements. Your doctor will let you know if your toddler needs a supplement.

In general, kids ages 12 to 24 months old should drink whole milk to help provide the dietary fats they need for normal growth and brain development. If overweight or obesity is a concern — or if there is a family history of obesity, high cholesterol, or heart disease — talk to your doctor to see if reduced-fat (2%) milk may be given. After age 2, most kids can switch to low-fat (1%) or nonfat milk. Your doctor can help you decide which kind of milk to serve your toddler.

Some kids may reject cow's milk at first because it doesn't taste like the familiar breast milk or formula. If your child is at least 12 months old and having this difficulty, mix whole milk with some formula or breast milk. Slowly adjust the mixture over time so it becomes 100% cow's milk.

Some kids don't like milk or cannot drink or eat dairy products. Explore other calcium sources, such as calcium-fortified soy beverages, calcium-fortified juices, fortified breads and cereals, cooked dried beans, and dark green vegetables like broccoli, bok choy, and kale.

Meeting Iron Requirements

Toddlers should have 7 milligrams of iron each day. After 12 months of age, they're at risk for iron deficiency because they no longer drink iron-fortified formula and may not be eating iron-fortified infant cereal or enough other iron-containing foods to make up the difference.

Cow's milk is low in iron. Drinking a lot of cow's milk also can put a toddler at risk for iron deficiency. Toddlers who drink a lot of cow's milk may be less hungry and less likely to eat iron-rich foods. Milk decreases the absorption of iron and also can irritate the lining of the intestine, causing small amounts of bleeding and the gradual loss of iron in the stool (poop).

Iron deficiency can affect growth and may lead to learning and behavioral problems. And it can lead to iron-deficiency anemia (too few red blood cells in the body). Iron is needed to make red blood cells, which carry oxygen throughout the body. Without enough iron and red blood cells, the body's tissues and organs get less oxygen and don't work as well as they should.

To help prevent iron deficiency:

- Limit your child's milk intake to about 16–24 ounces a day (2 to 3 cups).
- Serve more iron-rich foods (meat, poultry, fish, enriched grains, beans, tofu).
- When serving iron-rich meals, include foods that contain vitamin C (like tomatoes, broccoli, oranges, and strawberries), which improve the body's iron absorption.
- Continue serving iron-fortified cereal until your child is 18–24 months old.

Talk to your doctor if you're concerned that your child isn't eating a balanced diet. Many toddlers are checked for iron-deficiency anemia, but never give your child a vitamin or mineral supplement without first discussing it with your doctor.

Reviewed by: Elana Pearl Ben-Joseph, MD

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Note: All information on KidsHealth® is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.

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Post Test – April 2021

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1. The toddler years are a time of _____, especially between 12-24 months, when they're learning to eat table food and accepting new tastes and textures.
2. Depending on their age, size and activity level, toddlers need about _____ - _____ calories a day.
3. Nutrition is all about averages so don't panic if you don't hit every mark every day, just try to provide a wide _____ of nutrients.
4. For grains, 1 ounce equals 2 slices of bread.
True or False?
5. Milk provides calcium and vitamin D to help build strong _____.
6. Kids ages 12 to 24 months should drink whole milk to help provide the dietary fats they need for normal growth and _____ development.
7. Other calcium sources include calcium-fortified soy beverages and juices, fortified breads and cereals, cooked dried beans and dark green vegetables like broccoli, bok choy and kale.
True or False?
8. Toddlers should have _____ of iron each day.
9. Iron deficiency can affect growth and may lead to learning and _____ problems.
10. When serving iron-rich meals, include food that contain _____ (like tomatoes, broccoli, oranges and strawberries), which improve the body's iron absorption.

March 2021 Quiz Answers. 1.Refueling 2.Metabolism 3.Sugar 4.Nutrients
5.False 6.Calories 7.Balanced 8.True 9.Protein 10.Brain/Body



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