



Nutrition Throughout The Toddler Years



Raising a healthy, active toddler takes work, and many parents ask about the best foods to give to their child. Feeding a toddler is a tough job, but knowing about nutrition and good healthy eating habits will help you make the best choices for you and your child.

Milk and Dairy

Cow's milk has protein for strength and growth, calcium for strong bones and teeth, and vitamins A and D for eyes and bones. Children older than 1 year need 2-3 8oz servings of milk daily. Yogurt and cheese are also great sources of dairy.

Children under 1 year should not drink cow's milk. After their first birthday, most children should drink whole milk for at least a year. The fat in milk helps children grow and is important for brain development. If you have an overweight child, ask your provider about using 2 % milk. Children who are 2 years and older should also drink 1-2% milk. It is best for toddlers not to drink nonfat or skim milk.

Juice, fruit drinks, and soda

Children can easily become overweight from drinking too much soda, fruit drinks, and juice. These are also known to cause tooth decay. Children should drink milk with every meal and plain water for drinking in between meals. Occasionally 100 % fruit juice is fine as a treat, but you should try to limit it to less than 8 oz per day. It is also a good idea to water it down a bit. Whole fruit instead of fruit juice is always preferred whenever

Multivitamins

Most children do not need to take a multivitamin. Your toddler should get plenty of vitamins from fruits, vegetables, milk, meat, and whole-grain bread products. Even if your child is a picky eater, he or she is probably getting more than enough. Some children who do not drink enough milk may need to take extra vitamin D. Your provider may also do a blood test to see if your child needs extra iron. If your child does not eat meat or has a chronic illness, talk to your provider.

Fats

Some fats are actually very important for children. About 1/3 of a toddler's calories should come from healthy fats such as peanut butter (after 2 years old), milk, meat, and eggs. Examples of unhealthy fats are most fried foods, potato chips, doughnuts, and butter.

If your child is overweight, the best thing you can do is set a good example by eating healthy foods yourself. We do not recommend putting your child on a diet without talking to your provider first.

Eating habits

It is hard to know what toddlers will eat. They skip meals, refuse to eat, and sometimes eat only one thing for days at a time. This is normal and is usually nothing to worry about. Your provider will measure your child's growth at every well child exam and follow the progress on a growth chart. It is important to give your child a variety of healthy foods to choose from. Remember that you may need to offer your child a new food 10 times before he or she likes it!

Children usually prefer frequent small meals, or "grazing". It takes a long time for your toddler to get used to eating only 3 meals a day. Try to think of snack time as a "mini meal time". For example, a good afternoon snack might be milk, peanut butter on a small bagel, and carrot sticks. Get creative and have fun with these foods! Letting toddlers feed themselves is important, even if it is messy!

More information

For the internet savvy: There are many websites available that have good information about nutrition and children of all ages. We recommend these:

[American Academy of Family Physicians](#), [National Institutes of Health](#), CDC "5 a Day" program, [US Dept. of Agriculture](#) food pyramid