

# toddler. nutrition

For ease of reading the female gender has been used throughout this brochure.

The following information provides a brief guide to toddler nutrition and gives you some suggestions for feeding toddlers.



The development that occurs around the ages of one to three – the toddler years – is full of challenges for your child. They are constantly on the move learning about their world and how it works. They can be independent and resourceful, the next moment they are clinging and insecure. They can be cooperative then assert themselves saying ‘no’ to everything. Keep reminding yourself that this is all part of normal growth and development.

It is normal for a toddler’s appetite to decrease because their rate of growth slows down. A baby can triple their birth weight in the first 12 months but a toddler may only gain 2kg in an entire year.

Toddlers need approximately three small meals, and 2-3 healthy snacks each day, rather than three large meals as they have a small stomach. They should eat the same foods as the rest of the family but are less likely to enjoy heavily spiced and hot flavoured foods.

Full cream dairy products are recommended until toddlers are 2 years of age. If soy milk needs to be used, due to a cows milk allergy, make sure it is a calcium-enriched variety.



The fat in a toddler's diet should come from 3 serves of dairy per day (see quantities below), meat/fish/chicken or egg (1-2 serves per day). These same products will provide most of a toddler's protein requirements.

### What to feed toddlers

Toddlers will eat different amounts on different days. This depends on their day's activity, if they are tired or unwell.

**Offer a variety of healthy foods each day. The following is a rough guide to the amounts and types to offer, but don't worry if your child doesn't actually eat all of these every day.**

Vegetables	2 - 4 serves
Fruit	1 - 2 serves
Dairy Foods (milk, cheese, yoghurt)	3 serves
Meat, eggs, fish, lentils	1 - 2 small serves
Bread, cereal, rice and pasta	3 - 5 serves

Reference: [www.cyh.com.au](http://www.cyh.com.au) November 2008



Toddler

- Fruit and vegetables
- Breads, cereals, rice, pasta and noodles
- Meat, fish, chicken, eggs, nut paste, legumes
- Low fat cow's milk, or fortified soy milk, yoghurt, cheese, custard

Reference: Government of South Australia - Toddler Nutrition Guide. Accessed online [www.cyh.com.au](http://www.cyh.com.au) November 2008

Toddlers require fibre to prevent constipation. Suitable fibre includes whole wheat breakfast cereals, and wholemeal bread. Avoid food with a large content of seeds, nuts and grains as this may upset small stomachs.

Fruit and vegetables are good sources of vitamins and minerals. If toddlers prefer to eat them raw rather than cooked it is probably a good idea. Raw vegetables tend to have more vitamins than those that are cooked and are easy to prepare.

Honey and sugar should only be included in a toddler's diet in small amounts. Replace biscuits, cakes, chocolate and other sweets with snacks such as frozen fruit, bread with a spread cut into interesting shapes, raisin toast, celery sticks, cheese sticks, frozen yogurts or crackers, and crisp bread spread with a soft cheese.

Water is the best thirst quencher. Fruit juices and cordials can contain large amounts of sugar. They may cause diarrhoea if too much is consumed by toddlers. Fruit juice should be limited to about 150mls each day.

It is difficult to avoid salt in processed foods however it is a good idea to avoid adding salt to home prepared foods. This will help prevent toddlers becoming accustomed to expecting a salty taste, a habit many adults have acquired.

### Tips for feeding toddlers

- Make the evening meal for a toddler early to avoid them becoming over tired and unable to eat.
- Let your toddler know ahead of time that the meal will be ready soon as this will give her time to wind up any activities.
- Sit down when eating, preferably at a table with the family.
- Try to minimise distractions at meal time (e.g. turn the television off).

- Make meal times enjoyable experiences, not a battlefield. After 20-30 minutes it will be clear she's not going to finish her meal. Remove any remaining food without comment.
- Be positive and encouraging when your toddler has eaten or behaved well during a meal.
- Expect a mess and use surfaces that are easily cleaned.
- If possible allow your toddler to be involved in choosing her food for the next meal. Only give 2 options or she could become confused.
- Encourage your toddler to participate in the food preparation e.g. home made pizza or sandwiches.
- Offer three (3) small meals and two (2) healthy snacks each day.
- If your toddler has refused to eat on one occasion, she may eat more the next time.  
Remember, a healthy toddler will not starve.
- Give your toddler salad and raw, grated vegetables if she prefers these to cooked vegetables.
- Avoid take away or pre packaged food that contain high levels of salt and fat.
- Avoid using sweets and chocolate as rewards.
- Check the amount of milk, juice and cordial your child may be drinking. Large amounts will fill her up and she may not eat her meals.



## Typical physical and social/ personal characteristics related to eating during the preschool years

Age	Physical Characteristics	Social/personal characteristics
12-18 months	Grasps and releases food with fingers Holds spoon but use poor Turns spoon in mouth Uses a cup but release poor	<i>Wants food that others are eating</i> <i>Loves performing</i>
18 months - 2 years	Appetite decreases Likes eating with hands Likes experimenting with textures	<i>Ritual becomes important</i> <i>Displays food preferences</i> <i>Distracts easily</i> <i>Develops negative behaviour</i>
2 - 3 years	Holds glass in hand Places spoon straight in mouth Spills a lot Chews more food, but choking still a hazard	<i>Definite likes and dislikes</i> <i>Insists on 'doing it myself'</i> <i>Ritualistic</i> <i>Dawdles</i> <i>Food fads</i> <i>Demands food in certain shapes and whole foods</i> <i>Likes to help in the kitchen</i>

Adapted from NHMRC: Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia, 2003 Cited by QLD Health 2008

## Suggested meal plan for a toddler

<b>Breakfast</b>	Bowl of cereal with ½ cup milk 1 slice toast with polyunsaturated margarine with spread eg. Vegemite, jam, peanut butter, cheese, egg
<b>Snack</b>	Water Fruit eg. Slices banana, kiwi fruit, apricot, mandarin
<b>Lunch</b>	Meat, chicken, fish, cheese or egg with ¼ cup pasta/rice OR 1 slice of bread OR legumes ¼ cup cut up vegetables or ½ cup salad vegetables ½ cup custard or yoghurt Water to drink
<b>Snack</b>	½ cup whole milk 1 slice raisin bread
<b>Evening Meal</b>	Family food Chicken, meat, fish, cheese or egg eg. 1 small chop, slice roast meat, piece of fish 1 potato and ¼ cup other vegetables ¾ cup pasta OR 1 piece of bread ½ cup custard/yoghurt with ½ cup diced fruit

Ref: QLD Health 2008

Reviewed December 2008. References available on request.

### For further information and support please consult:

- Child & Family Health Nurse
- General Practitioner
- Karitane Careline on 1300 CARING (1300 227 464)

Web: [www.karitane.com.au](http://www.karitane.com.au)

E-mail: [Karitane.online@sswahs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Karitane.online@sswahs.nsw.gov.au)

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