

Healthy eating for toddlers (1-3 years)

A healthy balanced diet for a toddler is different from an older child or adult as they require more fat and less fibre than recommended for other age groups.

- Use some butter, margarine and oils in cooking
- Give a mixture of white and some wholemeal/whole grain breads and cereals (wholegrain foods alone are too filling for toddlers)
- Give a small serving of cake and biscuits with fruit for some puddings.

Toddlers eat best if they have a routine of three meals and two snacks per day planned around their sleeping pattern.

- Encourage them to enjoy their meals by eating with them and praising them.

Toddlers will get adequate amounts of all the nutrients and energy they require if their diet is based on combining foods from the five food groups. These are:

Bread, cereals and potatoes



Serve at each meal and aim for about five servings a day. Examples include:

- Cereal and/or bread, toast for breakfast
- Potatoes, rice, pasta, cous cous, bread for lunch or evening meal
- Bread, bread sticks, rice cakes, crackers for snacks.

Fruit and vegetables



Serve at each meal and aim for about five servings a day. Examples include:

- Serve fruit with breakfast and at least one fruit and vegetable with lunch and evening meal
- Use raw fruit and vegetables cut into cubes, sticks, slices for snacks
- Try roasted, baked or stir fried vegetables as these are a different flavour to boiled vegetables.



Milk, cheese and yoghurt

Serve three times a day. For example:

- Cheese in a sandwich or on top of a pizza, food served in a white cheese sauce (eg macaroni cheese) for lunch or evening meal
- A yoghurt, fromage frais, serving of custard or another milk pudding as a snack or a dessert
- A glass of milk, follow on formula or breastmilk.



Meat, fish and vegetarian alternatives

Serve once or twice a day for non-vegetarian and two or three times a day for vegetarians. Serve with a high vitamin C food/drink with vegetarian meals to facilitate iron absorption.

- Soft cuts of meat such as chicken, minced meat, sausages, paté or slowly cooked meat
- Oily fish such as mackerel, salmon and sardines in fish cakes or fish pie (up to twice a week for girls and four times a week for boys)
- Eggs, ground/chopped nuts and pulses (beans, chickpeas, hummus) are counted as vegetarian alternatives.



Foods high in fat and sugar

Allow some each day with, but not instead of the other food groups.

- Cakes, biscuits and ice-cream can be added to fruit for puddings on occasions
- Sweets, chocolates and confectionery as part of puddings on occasions
- Dilute sweetened drinks and serve in beakers or cups, not bottles or with a straw to reduce dental decay
- Rarely offer salty snacks, for example crisps.

See our 'Toddlers Portion Size Sheet' for appropriate portion sizes.

Toddlers should drink between six and eight drinks per day to ensure adequate hydration. For example, a drink with each meal and snack



- More may be needed in very hot weather or if they are particularly active
- Use beakers and cups instead of bottles
- The best drink to give between meals and snacks is water
- Dilute drinks containing sweeteners with a lot of water
- Large quantities of juices may reduce your toddlers' appetite or cause loose stools
- Do not give tea, coffee or fizzy drinks to toddlers.

Give toddlers a Vitamin A and D supplement each day

- This is for normal growth and development and to prevent rickets
- These are especially important for fussy eaters, toddlers of Asian, African and Middle Eastern origin and those living in northern areas of the UK
- Vitamin drops that contain vitamin C will also help iron absorption.

Some foods may cause harm



- Limit very salty foods to a minimum (this includes crisps and other salty snacks)
- Tooth decay can be caused by frequently drinking sugary, acidic drinks such as squashes and 'fruit juice' drinks between meals
- Do not give raw eggs or raw shellfish to toddlers as this may cause food poisoning. Ensure eggs are cooked right through
- Do not give shark, swordfish or marlin to toddlers as they contain high levels of mercury. Limit oily fish to twice a week for girls and four times a week for boys (this includes sardines, mackerel and salmon)
- Do not give whole nuts to toddlers due to risk of choking.