



How to Feed Your Toddler_(TG)



From age 12 months to 3 years, your child stops growing so fast. He starts to find out about his world, and he develops a mind of his own.

He may eat less now. That's okay—he knows how much he needs to eat. If you try to get him to eat more, he could get stubborn and eat less. Some toddlers would rather fight than eat.

What a toddler is like

Toddlers don't like new food. But they learn to like it, if you give them time. They need to see it on the table and see you eating it. After a while, they taste it—and take it back out of their mouth again. They'll do that lots of times, and sooner or later they swallow it—and probably like it.

What toddlers like one day, they don't like the next. They eat a lot one day and hardly anything the next. They don't eat some of everything at a meal like you do—they eat only one or two foods.

Let your child control his eating

Your toddler needs control over his own life and his own world. He also needs limits, to make his world the size he can handle.

With eating, that means you decide what food to buy and serve. You choose the times for eating. But once you have chosen the menu and the times, your child decides what and how much to eat. Even when you think he eats poorly, don't let him pick out something else. And don't let him pick what he wants from the supermarket shelves.

Avoiding food battles

Eating gives your toddler lots of chances to test his limits. During this tricky time, remember the division of responsibility in feeding:

You are responsible for *what* your child is offered to eat. He is responsible for *how much* and even *whether* he eats. As your child grows from a baby into a toddler, you also take charge of the *when* and *where* of feeding, setting up a routine for meals and snacks.

Your feeding responsibilities:

- Select and buy food.
- Make nutritious meals.
- Offer food to your toddler in a calm, neutral way. Don't force food on him.
- Don't feed your toddler on demand. Some toddlers eat way too little when you do that. Others eat way too much.
- Control the timing of meals and snacks. Your toddler's stomach is small and his energy needs are high, so he should have three meals a day with planned snacks in between. Don't let him panhandle for food at other times.
- Present foods in a form your child can eat. Your toddler can eat most food from the family table. But he still needs you to make some changes in the food so he can eat it better. Make food moist, cut meat finely.
- Let him eat in his own way. If you let your child look, feel, mash, and smell the food, he'll like it better. However, sometimes toddlers just mess around to get you to react. Then it's time to let him get down from the table.
- Don't make your child eat everything on his plate.
- Make family mealtimes nice times. Don't argue, fight or scold at mealtimes.
- Help your child take part in family meals. Don't feed your toddler some other time so you can have peace and quiet for your meal. He needs to eat with you.
- Help your child pay attention to his eating. Have some quiet time before it's time to eat. Your child needs to be calm, well-rested, and hungry to eat well. Don't have the television on: It distracts him from eating and interferes with family social time.
- Help your child learn to behave nicely at the table. It's natural for toddlers to be messy and noisy. But if your child is being messy and noisy just to get you to react, make him leave the table.

Getting enough of the right kind of food

If your child is growing well, he's eating the amount that's right for him. Toddlers don't eat very much, but it turns out they don't *have* to eat so much to get what they need. They need a helping only one-fourth to one-third the size of an adult's, or one tablespoon per year of age. If you're worried, talk with a dietitian.

What a meal should provide

Put four or five foods on the table at mealtime: a meat or other protein source, milk, a fruit or vegetable or both, bread and other starchy food, butter or margarine, and let your child pick and choose from what's available.

Wasting food

When your child is just learning to like new foods, you will have more food waste. He'll take food on his plate and eat just a bit, or not eat it at all. Or he won't be very good at estimating how much he will eat, and he'll serve himself too much. You can remind him, gently, not to take so much, but you shouldn't make him clean up his plate.

In the long run, your child will waste less food if you don't get pushy. He'll learn to like more foods, and he'll take responsibility for his own eating.

Food jags

Your child may go through a stage when he wants to eat the same food all the time. We call this a *food jag*. Planning meals out ahead of time helps make food jags less of a problem. If you ask your toddler what he wants to eat, he'll tell you he wants his favorite food. So don't ask. That way, he'll take his chances like the rest of the family—sometimes you get lucky, sometimes you don't.

Short-order cooking

When your toddler says he doesn't like the food on the table, ignore it, or say "Oh, okay." Don't jump up to short-order cook something else for him. Have his milk at his place when he gets there, put some bread on the table so he won't starve, help him dish up his plate, and let him eat.

Feeding for comfort

Don't use food to try to make your child feel better when he skins his knee, gets his feelings hurt, or is cranky. If you do, he'll learn to eat when he gets upset. It's tempting to give him a cookie when you want some peace and quiet, but save this "self-defense" feeding for those times when you have *really* had it.

Safety

Children under age 3 have a higher risk of choking than older children. To prevent choking:

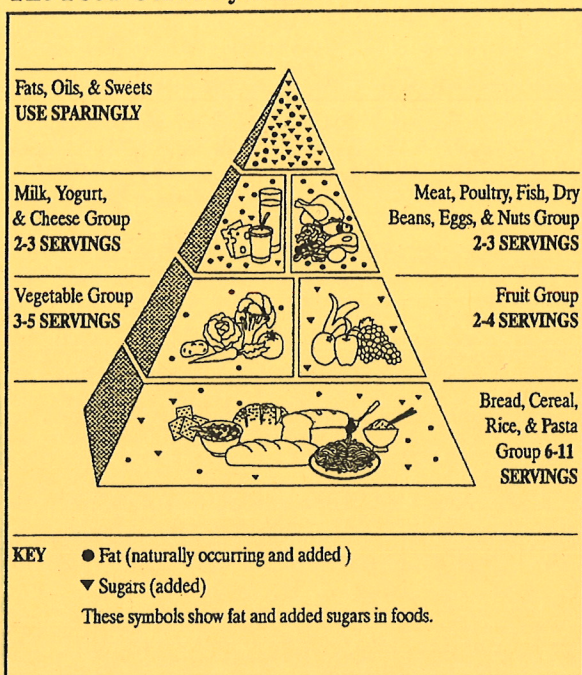
- Always be there while your child eats.
- Have your toddler sit down while he eats.
- Keep things calm at eating time. When children scream or laugh they catch their breath and could suck food into their lungs.
- Change the shape and size of some food: slice hot dogs the long way, cut grapes into four pieces.
- Stay away from hard, round foods like nuts, gum drops, raw carrots, jelly beans.



The Food Guide Pyramid^(TG)



The Food Guide Pyramid



The *Food Guide Pyramid* shows what a good diet is like. Why the pyramid shape? Because we should eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and grains, but not as many foods that are high in fat and sugar.

Children have their own ways of eating

The *Food Guide Pyramid* helps adults plan their meals. You can also use it as a guide for feeding your child. Just keep in mind that children have different ways of eating than adults.

Adults eat food even if it doesn't taste the best, because it's good for them and because they paid for it. Children eat what tastes good. And what tastes good to them today might not taste good tomorrow.

Adults usually eat some of everything that is put before them. Children eat only one or two foods. They ignore everything else.

It doesn't work to try to get children to eat like adults. When children are forced to eat, they lose interest in food and eat poorly.

Serve well-balanced meals and snacks and let your child choose

If you offer a variety of healthy meals and snacks, your child will eat what she needs. Plan your menus according to the *Food Guide Pyramid*. Then let your child pick and choose from what's available.

Bread, cereal, rice & pasta: Always put bread on the table, and let your child eat as much of it as she wants. Include another food from this group as well (rice or spaghetti, for example). Children generally like these "starchy" foods and have no trouble eating enough of them.

Fruits & vegetables: Fruits and vegetables are on separate lists, but they give many of the same nutrients. Sometimes children eat fruits, sometimes they eat vegetables, and there is no predicting which it will be! Try to offer a fruit and vegetable, two fruits, or two vegetables at mealtime. Offer fruit and vegetable juices at snack time.

Meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs & nuts: Offer a piece of meat, or put meat in casseroles, stews, or soups. Red meat has a lot of iron and zinc. Choose lean cuts to hold down on fat. Eggs, nuts, and cooked dried beans give protein, too.

Milk, yogurt & cheese: Offer milk at mealtime. At snack time, offer milk or juice. Use whole or 2% milk. You may also use 1% or skim milk after age two *if your child likes it*. If you use low-fat milk, you should offer other food with fat in it.

Fats, oils & sweets: Put butter or margarine on the table, as well as salad dressing, and let your child help herself.

You don't have to cut out sugar in your child's diet. Just don't let her fill up on sweets. A dessert a day and sugar on cereal are okay. A candy bar or soda once in a while is also fine.

Child-sized helpings

Use the *Food Guide Pyramid* as a guide to what you

have available for your child, but make her helpings child-sized. Children can get the nutrients they need from a helping one-quarter to one-half the size of an adult's, or one tablespoon per year of age, whichever works better for the particular food. If you're judging bread or a piece of fruit, use the fraction. For a vegetable or rice, the tablespoon might be an easier guide (for example, 3 tablespoons for a 3-year-old).

Your child will probably eat *more* than that—especially of bread. She may eat only part of the foods on the pyramid one day, and the foods from a whole different part the next. But it's amazing how all these different small amounts add up to give her the nutrients she needs.

Every food has a role to play

Makers of "super" cereals claim that protein and a day's supply of vitamins and minerals are in every bowl. That's fine, but it's not necessary. Each food has something to offer. Together, those foods should give the nutrients she needs.

This chart lists the main nutrients in each food group:

Breads and cereals	Carbohydrates, energy, B vitamins, iron (If <i>whole grain</i> , also offer vitamin E, zinc, fiber and magnesium)
Fruits and vegetables	Vitamins A and C, fiber, folic acid
Meat, poultry, fish (also dried cooked beans, eggs, nuts)	Protein, iron, zinc, B vitamins
Milk and other dairy products	Protein, calcium, vitamins A and D, riboflavin
Fats and sugars	Fatty acids Energy

Your part in feeding

It's important that you show your child how to eat well by eating well yourself. Remember, your job is to choose and prepare a well-balanced family meal. Include a food that your child generally likes. Then let her do *her* job of deciding what to eat and how much to eat. Trust her. If you do *your* job, in the long run, her nutrition will come out just fine.

HOW BIG IS A TODDLER HELPING?

Meat, poultry, fish	1 to 2 Tablespoons
Eggs	$\frac{1}{4}$
Cooked dried beans	1 to 2 Tablespoons
Pasta, rice, potatoes	1 to 2 Tablespoons
Bread	$\frac{1}{4}$ slice
Vegetables	1 to 2 Tablespoons
Fruit	1 to 2 Tablespoons or $\frac{1}{4}$ piece
Milk	$\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ cup
Butter, margarine, salad dressing	1 to 2 teaspoons per meal

Note: Toddlers may eat more or less, but this is how much you should serve them to start with. Most toddlers will eat about these amounts of one or two foods.

FEEDING CHILDREN

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD DO:

- ☐ Choose and buy food
- ☐ Make and offer meals
- ☐ Have meals and snacks at regular times
- ☐ Don't give children food handouts
- ☐ Include children in family meals
- ☐ Make foods easy to eat
- ☐ Make foods safe
- ☐ Let children eat like children
- ☐ Let them eat as much as they want
- ☐ Make mealtimes pleasant
- ☐ Talk and smile, but don't be distracting
- ☐ Keep mealtimes calm
- ☐ Teach children to behave at meals

WHAT CHILDREN SHOULD DO:

- ☐ Decide whether or not to eat
- ☐ Decide how much to eat
- ☐ Grow the way nature intended

KEEPING YOUNG CHILDREN FROM CHOKING

- Build children's eating skills by introducing semi-solid food, then moving to lumpy food, then soft pieces of table food.
- Have adults there when children eat.
- Have children sit to eat.
- Keep eating times calm and pleasant.
- Avoid nuts, raw carrots, jelly beans, hard candy.
- Quarter grapes, cut hot dogs the long way.
- Grind or finely cut meat.
- Know first aid for choking.