

# Feeding Toddlers **It can be challenging, but fun!**

AN INFORMATION SHEET FROM  
<https://bodiesminds.org/programs/5210>



## **YOUR BABY IS READY TO EXPLORE NEW FOODS!**

It's an exciting time. You've offered smashed bananas and given your growing toddler Cheerios (or the equivalent) for weeks or months already.

What's next? Here are some answers to parents' most common questions.

## **7 WAYS TO FOSTER HEALTHY EATING IN TODDLERS**

1. *Be a role model*
2. *Introduce new foods one at a time*
3. *Offer a rainbow of fruits and vegetables*
4. *Sit with your child when they eat*
5. *Establish eating routines*
6. *Provide toddler-size portions*
7. *Help your child tune into their own signals of hunger or fullness*

Parents play a major role in helping their toddlers establish healthy eating habits. ***Be a role model*** by eating healthy foods with your child. Young children often copy the actions of those around them. If they see you eating and enjoying a particular food, they may like it, too.

Toddlers like and need routines in their lives. ***Establish eating routines*** and ***sit down together at the table*** for meals and snacks. Doing this not only reinforces the importance of eating, but provides a time for family connections. Try to offer meals and snacks at the same time each day so children know what to expect.

Always ***introduce new foods one at a time*** to be able to identify any food allergies. Observe your child eating new textures of food to be alert for choking. Never force your child to eat a particular food, offer new foods in a relaxed manner so they become comfortable with a variety of foods. Also, ***help your child tune into their own signals of hunger or fullness*** by not forcing them to eat when they tell you they are not hungry or deny their requests for more.

**Remember:** It is ***your job to decide what your child is offered to eat*** and ***your child's job to decide how much to eat***. In this way, your child learns to eat a variety of healthy foods, but also learns to trust their own signals of hunger or fullness.



## **What foods should I feed my toddler?**

Your growing toddler needs lots of nutrition, but eats small amounts so it is important to ***make every bite count***. ***Focus on nutrition packed foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, dairy or dairy substitutes and foods high in protein***, (e.g. beans, nut butters, tofu, fish, eggs, poultry and meats).

### ***Aim for at least:***

***2 servings of fruit***

***2 protein servings***

***4-6 oz. of milk 3-4 times per day***

***3 servings of vegetables***

***4-6 servings of grains (mostly whole grains)***



**Start with soft foods.** Finger foods such as fruits, cooked vegetables, kidney or black beans are good choices. Yogurt, cheese and nut butters thinned with milk (thick nut butters can be a choking hazard) make good snacks.

**Avoid foods that are too hard, or a size and shape that can cause choking,** such as nuts or popcorn. As your child gets better at handling foods with more texture, you can offer more challenging foods. Cut raw vegetables or fruits into thin strips or pieces too small to get caught in little throats.

To assure your child obtains needed nutrients for healthy development, **serve your toddler (and yourself) fruits and vegetables from all the colors of the rainbow.** Children become comfortable with foods they see and eat often. If offered to them, children will learn to love a good variety of foods. In general, children prefer foods that are not too spicy, but they will learn to eat the foods their family regularly serves them. Children raised in different cultures develop very different palates.

### **How much should my toddler eat?**

Remember your child is smaller than an adult, so needs toddler size (not adult size) portions. **Start with a tablespoon of each food for each year of your child's age,** but allow your child to ask for more if they are hungry. Never force your child to eat more food than they are hungry for.

**Children can only eat small amounts at a time and get hungry between meals.** Offering a small, healthy snack between meals in the morning and afternoon is a good idea. But... It is important to realize that if children eat too many snacks, they will not be hungry at meal time.

### **What if my child is really choosy about what he or she eats?**

Toddlers can definitely be fussy eaters!

However, **it's normal for toddlers to become more choosy about what they eat** for a variety of reasons. Their growth is slowing down and they are not as hungry. They are starting to separate from you, which causes them to be more cautious about trying an unknown food.

When introducing a new food to your child, it may help if you eat the food with them. Sometimes toddlers want the same food over and over just as they want you to read the same book over and over. Then suddenly, they don't want that food anymore, but want a different food. Remembering that this is just a stage can help you to be patient.

---

### **5-2-1-0 IS SPONSORED LOCALLY BY**



[WWW.BODIESMINDS.ORG](http://WWW.BODIESMINDS.ORG)

**Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds** is one of Rhode Island's 10 Health Equity Zones (HEZ), funded in part by the **Rhode Island Department of Health.**

A storehouse of information on healthy eating, active living, mental wellness and fostering healthy child development. Visit our website for more resources.

And join others in discussions about local topics at [ourbodiesminds.org!](http://ourbodiesminds.org)

*This project received generous support from*

