

What should a toddler or preschooler eat?



Toddlers and preschoolers should eat the same foods as adults but in smaller amounts. Plan for three meals and two to three snacks per day to help keep them satisfied and happy. Meals and snacks should include foods from each of the four food groups in [Canada's Food Guide](#). That will help your child get the energy and nutrients he or she needs to grow, develop, and be active. Limit low-nutrient foods that are high in salt, fat, sugar and caffeine such as chips, chocolate, candies, sugary drinks and pop. Keep juice to one serving per day (125-175 mL or 4-6 oz.). Serve water to preschoolers when they are thirsty.

Snacks should include foods that might be missed at meals - for example vegetables and fruit. Other nutritious snack choices include breads, cereals, milk, cheese, yogurt, meat or meat alternatives. Each snack should provide a serving from at least 2 different food groups. Avoid sticky, sweet foods such as dried fruit and candy, which can stick to the teeth and cause cavities (unless children brush their teeth right after). Avoid spoiling meals by serving snacks 1 to 2 hours before meal times.

Be aware of foods that can cause choking such as peanuts, nuts, seeds, hot dogs, grapes, raw vegetables, and chunky peanut butter for children under the age of 3. If served, cut wieners/sausages lengthwise into strips, then cut into bite-size pieces; for raw fruit - remove pits, seeds and peels and cut into bite-size pieces; cut grapes in half; for raw vegetables - cut into narrow strips or grate; spread smooth peanut butter thinly;

never serve it right off a spoon. Don't serve young children popcorn or hard candies.

Preschoolers like foods presented in fun and interesting ways e.g. different colours, shapes, and flavours. They also like finger foods and foods served separately on a plate more than mixed dishes. Do not restrict fat in children's diets. Nutritious higher-fat foods such as peanut butter and cheese can help younger children meet their energy and nutrient needs. High fat foods that are low in vitamins and minerals (e.g. chips, cookies) should be limited as they fill children up and can decrease their intake of more nutritious foods.

A preschooler's appetite varies from day to day so let him decide how much he wants to eat. Children who are forced to eat may lose touch with their body's natural appetite control system. This can lead to overeating and possible weight problems and eating disorders. Parents and caregivers are responsible for providing healthy food choices and setting meal and snack times.

Family mealtimes should be encouraged as often as possible in order for children to learn healthy eating habits. Encouraging preschoolers to stay active is also important to help them grow and develop properly and maintain a healthy weight.

Helpful books:

- *Better Food for Kids* by Diana Kalnins, RD and Joanne Saab, RD (The Hospital for Sick Children/Robert Rose Inc. 2002)

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