

My toddler is a picky eater. How can I make sure he eats enough of the right things?



Many children go through a “picky eater” stage. Picky eaters often eat slowly or play with their food. Wanting the same foods all the time or refusing to eat certain foods is common. Many parents and caregivers are concerned about how much their child may or may not eat. Many factors such as growth spurts and activity levels will affect appetites, but over time, your child’s intake of nutrients and energy usually average out to achieve a healthy balance. Steady growth is the best way to tell that your toddler is getting enough to eat. As frustrating as it may seem, children can overcome the picky eating phase.

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide can help you plan and choose a variety of healthy snacks for your toddler. Provide a variety of foods from each of the four food groups – vegetables and fruit, grain products, milk and alternatives and meat and alternatives. The recommended number of food guide servings per day will depend on the age and sex of your toddler. A toddler-size serving is usually half the food guide serving of an adult. Larger portions can intimidate a child. Also, check the timing of snacks. Although planned snacks are a great way to help children get calories and nutrients they need for growth and development, be sure that you don’t offer snacks too close to regular meal times.

If your child only eats a few foods, try to introduce more variety. Allowing children to eat only a few select foods makes it harder for them to accept new foods later. They also may not get all the nutrients they need.

When your child says no to new foods, don't give up. A child may need to be exposed to new foods many times

before they will accept them. Also, children are more likely to enjoy a variety of foods and try different foods if you do. Trust your toddler to know when he is hungry or full. Pressuring your child to eat will not help.

If you have a picky eater or small eater, the following tips might help:

- Add pureed or minced vegetables to spaghetti sauce, hamburgers, soups, muffins or bread.
- Offer some nutritious foods that contain fat like peanut or soy nut butter, milk or cheese.
- Satisfy children’s thirst with water. Drinking lots of juice can fill up their little stomachs so that they are not hungry at regular meal times.
- Try new foods in small amounts and in a form that your toddler can easily handle.

Keep in mind that healthy eating should be fun. If meal times become a battlefield to get your toddler to eat, he or she will learn not to like it. Although parents and caregivers are responsible for **what, when and where** children eat, children are responsible for **how much** and **whether** they eat.

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