











Nutrition for toddlers is similar to that of adults when it comes to the kinds of nutrients they need. Kids need vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, proteins, and fats.² Providing foods from every food group ensures your toddler receives the necessary essential nutrients in order to grow, stay healthy, and have lots of energy. Your job is to provide foods that have the highest content of these nutrients, which are found in vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy, and proteins, such as meat, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts.

Food group	2 year olds	3 year olds	4 and 5 year olds	What counts as:
Fruits Focus on whole fruits 	1 cup	1 – 1½ cups	1 – 1½ cups	½ cup of fruit? ½ cup mashed, sliced, or chopped fruit ½ cup 100% fruit juice ½ small banana 4-5 large strawberries 
Vegetables Vary your veggies 	1 cup	1 – 1½ cups	1½ – 2 cups	½ cup of veggies? ½ cup mashed, sliced, or chopped vegetables 1 cup raw leafy greens ½ cup vegetable juice 1 small ear of corn 
Grains Make half your grains whole grains 	3 ounces	3 – 5 ounces	4 – 5 ounces	1 ounce of grains? 1 slice bread 1 cup ready-to-eat cereal flakes ½ cup cooked oatmeal, rice, or pasta 1 tortilla (6" across) 
Protein Foods Vary your protein routine 	2 ounces	2 – 4 ounces	3 – 5 ounces	1 ounce of protein foods? 1 ounce cooked meat, poultry, or seafood 1 egg 1 Tablespoon peanut butter ¼ cup cooked beans or peas (kidney, pinto, lentils) 
Dairy Choose low-fat or fat-free milk or yogurt 	2 cups	2 – 2½ cups	2½ cups	½ cup of dairy? ½ cup milk 4 ounces yogurt ¾ ounce cheese 

Courtesy: United States Department of Agriculture. choosemyplate.gov³

Vegetables

Children need a *variety* of colorful veggies, dark-green vegetables, starchy vegetables, red and orange vegetables, beans and peas, and other vegetables. Don't give up if your child refuses to eat something. Sometimes they need to be offered the same food *multiple* times before they'll try it. Aim for a total of one to one-and-a-half cups per day.^{4,5}

Fruits

Kids don't usually need much convincing to eat fruit, however do encourage them to eat a variety of *colors*, tastes, and textures of *fruit*. One to one and a half cups daily is recommended.

Grains

Grains are foods made from wheat, oats, cornmeal, barley, and rice. Foods like breads, rice, pastas, tortillas, and cereals are in the grain category. Toddlers need three-to-five ounces daily, and at least half of these should come from whole grains, such as whole wheat bread, crackers, pasta, brown rice, and oatmeal. One ounce equals a slice of bread, a half of a cup of cooked rice, pasta, or oatmeal, or one cup of ready-to-eat cereal.

Proteins

Proteins include lean meats, poultry, seafood, beans, lentils, and eggs. Your toddler should get two-to-four ounces a day. At each meal, serve an ounce of meat, ½ cup of beans, or one egg.

Dairy

For a one year old, the fat from whole milk is essential for normal growth and brain development. After two, most kids are switched over to low-fat or nonfat milk, which provides calcium and vitamin D to help build strong bones. Children ages one through five should get no more than 24 ounces of cow's milk, goat's milk, or soy milk per day to help prevent iron deficiency. Too much milk decreases the absorption of iron, which can affect growth and development, and it can cause behavioral problems.⁶ Too much milk can also cause toddlers to not eat their meals.

Snacks

Toddlers love snacks. Think of snack time as an opportunity to provide more nutrients by offering healthy choices. Schedule snack times as part of their daily routine to ensure your kiddos aren't snacking all day long.¹⁰

Suggestions for Mealtime Routines¹¹

- Turn off TV and electronics
- Wash Hands
- Sit together at the table. Always supervise your child's meals and snack times in case they choke or show signs of allergies.
- Child-sized dishes help to create toddler sized portions. Their tummies are roughly the size of their fist.
- Serve toddlers the same foods everyone else is eating, but cut into small pieces to prevent choking.
- Remember *a toddler's appetite fluctuates depending on their age, activity or energy levels*, their temperament, or whether they're in a growth spurt. Let them decide how much or how little they need. Don't force them to finish a meal they're not hungry for or eat something they don't like, however do encourage them to try new foods.
- Shop with a menu in mind and buy a variety of foods.

Allergies¹²

While you are still introducing new foods to your toddler, you also need to be watchful for food allergies. The following are the eight most common foods that pose a risk for allergies:

- Eggs
- Milk
- Peanuts
- Soy
- Wheat
- Tree nuts (like walnuts and cashews)
- Fish and shellfish (such as shrimp).

Introduce only one new food at a time, so if there is a reaction, you can be relatively certain of the source. If your

child develops hives, itchy skin, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, breathing issues, or any reaction to a food, then stop serving that food at once and see your medical provider right away.

Safety

To be safe, eat meals together at the table and always supervise your child's snack time in case they choke or show signs of allergies.¹³ Take a CPR class. Knowing how to handle a choking emergency will give you peace of mind and may save your child. Finally, see your medical provider if your child always refuses to eat, is losing weight, experiences a reaction to a food, or if you have any concerns about their diet and nutrition.

Ways to Include More Whole Grains in Your Menu¹⁴

- Make simple shifts. Choose 100% whole-wheat bread, bagels, pasta, and tortillas, brown rice, oatmeal, or grits.
- Make whole grain snacks like popcorn or rye crackers.
- When you have the time, cook extra brown rice and oatmeal to serve later in the week when time is short.
- Use whole grains in mixed dishes, such as barley in vegetable soups or stews and bulgur wheat in casseroles or stir-fries. Try a quinoa salad or pilaf.
- Change up your favorite meal with whole grains. Try brown rice stuffing in baked green peppers or tomatoes, and whole-wheat noodles in lasagna.
- Experiment by substituting buckwheat, millet, or oat flour for up to half of the flour in your favorite pancake or waffle recipes. To limit saturated fat and added sugars, top with fruit instead of butter and syrup.
- Set a good example for children by serving and eating whole grains every day with meals or as snacks.
- Read the ingredients list and choose products that name a whole-grain ingredient first on the list. The color of a food is not an indication that it is a whole-grain food. Foods labeled as "multi-grain," "stone-ground," "100% wheat," "cracked wheat," "seven-grain," or "bran" are usually not 100% whole-grain products, and may not contain any whole grain.

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