

Healthy eating

feeding your toddler



giving your
child a healthy
balanced diet



Food
Standards
Agency
eatwell.gov.uk

Just like adults, young children need food for energy, as well as for nutrients such as protein, fat, carbohydrate, vitamins and minerals. This is to help them grow properly and be active.

Q What should my toddler be eating?

A At this age, children are growing very quickly and are usually very active, so they need plenty of energy (calories) and nutrients. A healthy and varied diet should provide all the nutrients your toddler needs.

Remember to include these sorts of foods every day:

- milk and dairy foods – these provide calories, protein, vitamins and minerals
- meat, fish, eggs, beans, peas, lentils, tofu – these are rich in nutrients such as protein, vitamins and minerals. You can give boys up to four portions of oily fish a week, such as mackerel, salmon and sardines, but it's best to give girls no more than two portions of oily fish a week (see eatwell.gov.uk/fish for more information)
- bread, rice, pasta, breakfast cereals with added vitamins, potatoes, yams, sweet potatoes – these starchy foods provide calories, vitamins, minerals and fibre
- fruit and vegetables – these contain vitamin C, and other protective vitamins and minerals, as well as fibre



Q Can my toddler eat the same food as us?

A Toddlers can eat the same food as adults but, before they're two years old, children can't eat large amounts of food at one sitting and should not have a diet that is low in fat or high in fibre.

So, until then, it's especially important to give your child meals and snacks packed with calories and nutrients (sometimes called 'nutrient-dense foods') such as:

- full-fat milk and dairy foods
- meat
- eggs

Don't forget to give your toddler a variety of fruit and vegetables and starchy foods as well.

High-fibre starchy foods such as wholemeal bread or pasta, or brown rice, can be introduced gradually. A high-fibre diet is more bulky, which means it could fill up your child too quickly so they don't get all the energy they need. And too much fibre can sometimes reduce the amount of minerals a child can absorb, such as calcium and iron.

Between the ages of two and five years old, small children should be making a gradual move to eating family food, which is lower in fat and higher in fibre. By the time they are five years old, young children should be eating family food, but make sure it doesn't contain too much sugar, salt or saturated fat.

Semi-skimmed, 1% fat and skimmed milk

When your toddler is two years old, if he or she is eating a varied and balanced diet and growing well, then you can start giving your toddler semi-skimmed milk.

Fully skimmed and 1% fat milk aren't suitable as a main drink until a child is five years old because they don't contain enough vitamin A and skimmed milk doesn't contain enough calories.

It's a good idea to give vitamin drops to children under five, particularly vitamins A, C and D – check with your health visitor or GP for more information.

Some families with children under four, who are receiving certain benefits, can get free vitamin supplements and weekly vouchers to spend on milk, fruit and vegetables through the Healthy Start scheme (this will depend on your income). You can find out more at www.healthystart.nhs.uk



Q What foods should be avoided?

A Take care to avoid the following foods:

- Don't give raw eggs, or food that contains raw or partly cooked eggs, to your toddler because of the risk of salmonella, a type of food poisoning. If you give eggs to your toddler, make sure the eggs are cooked until both the white and the yolk are solid.
- Don't give whole peanuts or any type of whole nuts to children under five years old because they could cause choking. It's a good idea always to grind nuts finely.
- Avoid shark, swordfish or marlin because the levels of mercury in these fish can affect a child's developing nervous system.
- You might want to avoid raw shellfish to reduce the risk of food poisoning.
- There is no need to add salt to your toddler's food. Some salt is found naturally in most foods and between the ages of one and three, children should be having no more than 2g of salt or 0.8g sodium a day. If you're buying processed foods, such as breakfast cereals and ready meals, even those aimed at children, remember to check the label and choose those with less salt.
- There is no need to add sugar or honey to food for your toddler. You can help stop your toddler developing a sweet tooth by limiting how often you give sweet food or drinks to your child. Also, to help keep your toddler's teeth healthy, it's best not to allow children to sip sugary drinks throughout the day or to suck sweets too often. This is because the longer the sugar is in contact with their teeth, the more damage it can do. The sugar in dried fruit and fruit juice can also cause decay if eaten or drunk frequently between meals.



Sweet drinks

Try not to give your toddler fizzy sugary drinks and fruit squash because these drinks cause tooth decay. They can also fill children up so they don't eat enough food to get the nutrients they need.

If you do give fruit squash or sugary drinks, including fruit juice, to your toddler:

- make sure you dilute the drinks well with water
- keep these drinks to mealtimes
- between meals it's better to give water or milk to drink



Food allergy

If you have been told that your child has a food allergy or intolerance and they need to avoid certain foods, it's important to make sure they are still getting all the nutrients they need.

If you're concerned about your child's diet, it's a good idea to talk to a dietitian, who can advise you how your child can avoid the foods they are sensitive to, and still have a healthy diet. Remember, don't cut out food groups from your child's diet without medical advice.





Vegetarian diets

If you're giving your toddler a vegetarian diet it's important to make sure it's balanced and includes foods rich in nutrients, such as milk, cheese, eggs and some fortified breakfast cereals (try to choose breakfast cereals that are lower in salt and sugar). This means their diet won't be too bulky and they'll get plenty of protein, vitamin A, calcium and zinc.

Iron is found in many vegetables and pulses (such as beans, lentils and chick peas), in dried fruit (such as apricots, raisins and sultanas), and in some fortified breakfast cereals.

But iron is more difficult to absorb from vegetable sources than from meat, so:

- give your toddler foods containing iron each day
- try to give food or drink that is high in vitamin C, such as fruit, vegetables or fruit juice, at the same time as foods containing iron because this could make it easier for the body to absorb the iron
- don't give young children tea or coffee, especially at mealtimes, because this might reduce the amount of iron they can absorb

Vegan diets

If you're feeding your toddler a vegan diet, it's important they get enough energy and nutrients such as iron, calcium, vitamin B₁₂ and vitamin D. They might need extra vitamin supplements – check with your GP or dietitian.

Q Where can I get more information?

- A Your health visitor or GP can give you more information. You might also be interested in other booklets in this series published by the Food Standards Agency.

You might find it useful to read *Birth to five*, which is published by health departments in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and is available free to first-time parents. The Health Education Board for Scotland produces a book called *Ready steady baby*, which is free to first-time parents in Scotland.

If you haven't already got a copy of one of these books, speak to your GP or health visitor, or contact your local health promotion unit.

You can find out more about food and nutrition for different age groups, including toddlers at:
eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages





eatwell.gov.uk/toddler

For more information and advice about food,
visit the Food Standards Agency's websites:

eatwell.gov.uk

food.gov.uk

Food Standards Agency Publications

To order copies of this or other publications produced
by the Agency, contact Food Standards Agency Publications:

tel **0845 606 0667**

minicom **0845 606 0678**

fax **020 8867 3225**

email **foodstandards@ecgroup.co.uk**

Published by the Food Standards Agency 2002.
Reprinted with amendments 1109.

Printed by BKT
Front cover photography: Janine Wiedel.

© Crown copyright 2002
Printed in England on paper comprising a minimum of 75% recycled fibre
FSA/0455/1109