

Feeding your toddler or preschooler

Reviewed by SickKids Staff | Last updated: September 27th 2013

Discover some easy, creative and nutritious meal and snack ideas for your toddler or preschooler.

Key points

- Offer your toddler or preschooler a range of options from all four food groups.
- Be sure to offer toddlers soft, bite-sized pieces of food, paying attention to the risk of choking.
- Use meal planning with your preschooler as an opportunity to talk about nutrition.
- Help your child develop good eating habits by balancing a relaxed family mealtime atmosphere with rules about when a child can leave the table.



Children from age one to four usually are usually exploring new foods and developing their eating habits. Meal plans can help them enjoy a variety of foods while saving you time during the week.

Balancing the food groups for toddlers

Meet your child's needs by including food from all [food groups](#) in their diet. Continue to offer new food to encourage a wider variety of food choices in your child's diet.

You do not need to restrict fat in your child's diet when they are under the age of two. Their rapid growth needs the high energy content that fat delivers. In addition, a child's brain grows rapidly in the first two years of life. Your child needs [fat](#) to support this growth and development. For children under the age of two, choose high-fat cheese and yogurt as well as high-fat, homogenized (3.25%) milk.

Keep a balance among the food groups to encourage healthy eating.

Sample meal plan

This sample meal plan will help give you a start with "creative" meal planning for your family. Feel free to change it to suit your child's or family's needs using the suggestions listed below.

Day 1

Breakfast: Cereal, milk, berries

Lunch: Pasta, tomato sauce, cheese, grated or cubed

Dinner: Fish, mashed potato, broccoli

Snack ideas: Toast fingers, yogurt, fruit

Day 2

Breakfast: Pancakes, yogurt, banana

Lunch: Grilled cheese sandwich, cucumber cubes

Dinner: Tofu cubes (stir fried), brown rice, mixed vegetables

Snack ideas: Banana muffin (mini), fruit salad

Day 3

Breakfast: Scrambled egg, toast, melon

Lunch: Brown rice, meatballs, broccoli

Dinner: Chicken breast, pita triangles, corn niblets

Snack ideas: Mini, plain rice cakes, cheese and crackers

Day 4

Breakfast: Cereal, yogurt, berries

Lunch: Sandwich, turkey, carrots (steamed)

Dinner: Spaghetti, meat sauce, peas

Snack ideas: Cheese on toast, veggie sticks (steamed) and hummus

Day 5

Breakfast: Toast, peanut butter or soy butter, peach slices

Lunch: Cottage cheese, fruit salad cubes, avocado spears

Dinner: Egg omelette or frittata, toast fingers, red pepper bites (blanched or lightly stir fried)

Snack ideas: Yogurt, cereal Os (dry), orange pieces (cut and peeled)

Food ideas by food group

Remember that toddlers are still learning to chew and swallow. Be sure to offer soft, bite-sized pieces of food small enough for them to manage. You can make the pieces a little bigger as your child becomes better at eating and chewing, but you still need to be aware of the risk of [choking](#).

Vegetables and fruit (in bite-sized pieces)

- Peeled cucumber
- Peeled, soft apple pieces
- Orange wedges or slices
- Mini broccoli trees (blanched or steamed, if needed)

Grain products

- Cereal (O-shaped cereal especially)
- Whole wheat toast fingers
- Whole wheat pasta
- Whole wheat pita or chapatti
- Whole wheat couscous or brown rice

Milk and alternatives

- 3.25% fat milk (homogenized)
- Cheese cut into bite-sized cubes
- Plain yogurt with berries
- Cottage cheese (low sodium, if available)

Meat and alternatives (in bite-sized pieces)

- Turkey, beef, pork mini meatballs
- Spaghetti sauce made with ground chicken or extra lean ground beef
- Mini chicken kebabs (remove skewer before serving)
- Baked or barbecued fish

Meals and snacks for preschoolers

Children between the ages of two and four are exploring new foods. Remember to provide a variety of foods in a relaxed atmosphere and at predictable times.

Regular meal and snack times will help you establish a predictable eating routine. Use

[Canada's Food Guide](#) to help you include three of the four food groups at each meal and one or two of the food groups at each snack.

Other tips for keeping meal times enjoyable:

- Let your child's appetite be the guide. It is normal for your child to eat and drink more on some days and less on others.
- Keep a relaxed atmosphere when your preschooler eats. This sets a positive tone for them to enjoy food with others. Engage all family members in conversation, including your preschooler.
- At times, your preschooler may want to leave the table to go play. Have a set of family rules about when children are allowed to leave the table. Sitting together and eating is an important time for your family, but try to be flexible so that eating does not become a chore or punishment.

Meal planning

Once your child is a preschooler, you can ask them to help you with meal planning. Use this opportunity to teach them about Canada's Food Guide and have them pick out foods from each food group. This will help them learn more about nutrition and healthy food choices.

Other ways to include your preschooler in family meal times

- Help your child become familiar with what is involved in planning meals. For example, have them check ingredients and write a shopping list.
- Allow your child to help prepare and cook a meal in a safe way, for instance by helping to wash vegetables or add ingredients into a mixing bowl.
- Offer foods that are easy for your child to eat on their own.
- Follow a meal plan like the one below to help you plan your preschooler's meals and snacks.

Sample meal plan

Day 1

Breakfast: French toast (whole wheat bread), canned peaches, milk

Lunch: Chicken with shredded lettuce and carrots in whole wheat pita, melon slices, milk

Dinner: Broiled ham steak with potatoes and corn, fruit, oatmeal cookie, milk

Snack ideas: Apple with cheese, whole wheat crackers, bran muffin with apple juice

Day 2

Breakfast: Oatmeal, orange sections, milk

Lunch: Egg salad sandwich, raw vegetables with yogurt dip, milk

Dinner: Turkey burger on whole wheat bun, sweet potato fries, frozen yogurt, milk

Snack ideas: Whole wheat toast with cream cheese and orange segments, graham crackers
fresh/canned peaches

Day 3

Breakfast: Cold whole grain cereal, apple, milk

Lunch: Vegetable soup, peanut butter on whole wheat pita bread triangles, pudding, milk

Dinner: Veggie/beef with pasta, mixed dark green lettuce salad, whole grain bread, milk

Snack ideas: Banana and berry smoothie, whole wheat crackers and cheese with kiwi halves

Day 4

Breakfast: Bagel with light cream cheese, orange sections, milk

Lunch: Macaroni and cheese, carrots and broccoli, oatmeal cookie, milk

Dinner: BBQ chicken, corn, green beans, whole wheat bread, milk

Snack ideas: Graham crackers and apple sauce, banana and yogurt

Day 5

Breakfast: Cold whole grain cereal, fruit, milk

Lunch: Tuna sandwich, vegetables, yogurt (plain or fruit), milk

Dinner: Pork or beef kebobs, couscous or rice, apple crisp, milk

Snack ideas: Whole wheat crackers with hummus and orange juice, bran muffin

[Please visit AboutKidsHealth.ca](https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca) for more child health information.

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