This is a very active time in your growing child’s life. Toddlers are full of energy and curiosity. They are becoming much more independent and aware of themselves as individuals. At this age, they love to explore and try to do things on their own but also may seem selfish and self-centered. This is because they don’t yet have the ability to think about how others feel or consider what others want. They are very busy and curious and need understanding adults who have a good sense of humor.

FEEDING YOUR TODDLER

Good nutrition at any age starts with a solid foundation, and the best foundation is the ChooseMyPlate.

In an effort to make it easier for parents to determine how to feed their children nutritious, balanced meals, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) promotes an easy-to-follow food guide ChooseMyPlate. The colorful divided plate includes sections for vegetables, fruits, grains, and foods high in protein with room for dairy products.

Just by looking at the picture, you know right away vegetables and fruits should take up half the plate (with the veggie portion a bit bigger), and grains and protein foods should take up the other half (with the grains portion a bit bigger). And with a side helping of dairy, you’re reminded children also need a serving of milk or another dairy food (like cheese or yogurt) at each meal.

Because ChooseMyPlate is a divided plate, no one food group overpowers the others. This message encourages eating a variety of foods with lots of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, along with meats or other forms of protein and dairy products.

While oils provide important nutrients and are recommended in small amounts, they aren’t included on the ChooseMyPlate picture. This is because dietary guidelines recommend limiting oils, solid fats, and foods with added sugars. These foods provide what are considered empty calories—meaning they add plenty of calories but little or no nutritional value.
I like to climb and to take things apart.

I can probably say six words or more.

I can stack things and make a tower three blocks high.

I can hold my own drinking cup in both hands.

I can walk alone and seldom fall.

**WHAT’S IT LIKE TO BE 15-18 MONTHS OLD?**

Toddlers are notoriously picky eaters! Many toddlers only eat small amounts of food at a time and can go on food “jags,” where they refuse all but one or two favorite foods. Some toddlers appear to lose interest in eating altogether! Keep in mind the reason your child may not be eating as much as he did when he was a baby is because he is not growing as quickly, and therefore is not as hungry. Also, as they grow older, children are less interested in food. They are more interested in what is happening around them. As long as your toddler is growing within normal guidelines (as provided by your pediatrician), unusual eating behaviors are no cause for concern.

To help your toddler be a good eater, remember this rule: parents and caregivers are responsible for the “what” and the “when”—what foods to serve and when to offer them. Children are responsible for how much they eat and whether they eat a particular food.

For additional information on ChooseMyPlate for preschoolers, go to [www.choosemyplate.gov/kids](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/kids).

---

**Toddler Servings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Group</th>
<th>SERVINGS per Day</th>
<th>Examples of One Toddler Serving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GRAINS</td>
<td>6 to 11</td>
<td>Bread—1/4 slice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tortilla—1/4 piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hot cereal, rice, noodles—2 Tablespoons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cold cereal—1/4 cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VEGETABLES</td>
<td>3 to 5</td>
<td>Cooked/Canned—2 Tablespoons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Raw—1/4 cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRUITS</td>
<td>2 to 4</td>
<td>Cooked/Canned—2 Tablespoons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Raw—1/4 cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Juice—1 ounce (1/8 cup)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAIRY</td>
<td>4 to 6</td>
<td>Milk, yogurt—1/2 cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cheese—3/4 ounce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cooked meats—1/2 ounce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEATS</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>Cooked ground meat or canned tuna—2 Tablespoons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beans/baked tofu—1/4 cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peanut butter—1 Tablespoon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just remember, toddler servings are much smaller than adult servings. Using a child-size, smaller plate will help you with providing the correct portion size. The information below can serve as a guideline for proper portion sizes for children from 12 – 24 months.
**WHAT’S IT LIKE TO BE 18–24 MONTHS OLD?**

- I like to do things for myself.
- I am very active and want to find out about everything.
- I can walk and run and climb and jump.
- I have a very short attention span.
- Sometimes I lose control of myself and have a temper tantrum.
- I can understand some rules, but not very many.
- I can be easily frustrated.
- I can show love and affection for the people who are special to me.
- I can feed myself and help clean up.

**FEEDING TIPS**

- Portion sizes for small children are small. Refer to the chart on page 2 for guidance. A toddler’s portions should be about 2/3 the size of an older child’s portions.
- Offer your child a variety of nutritious food choices throughout the day and the week, and you can be reasonably assured nutritional needs will be met over time.
- Toddlers are learning to be independent. You can help your child feel more independent by offering a choice whenever possible. Offer a variety of choices with different textures and colors. This makes food more interesting and introduces your child to many different foods.
- Make it easy for a child to eat. The toddler may need child-size spoons and forks, a smaller plate and sippy cup, and a booster chair.
- A child will feel more independent if he can eat by himself. Prepare foods to be eaten with the fingers.
- Model healthy eating by having family mealtime when possible. Do not reward children with treats or dessert for eating a new or healthy food.
All children grow, learn, and develop at different rates. The information in this brochure is considered typical for children of this age. If you do all you can to help children grow and develop now, they will have the best chance to do well in school and in life.

References:

FEEDING TIPS

- Children like to eat foods they have helped to prepare. Give a child a simple job to do. For example, they can take apples out of the refrigerator or tear lettuce for a salad.
- Do not force a child to eat a food he or she does not like, and do not force a child to eat when not hungry.
- Serve meals and snacks at regular times. Children need daily routines. Plan meals and snacks when your child is likely to be hungry and not when tired or too excited. A minimum of 2 hours between snacks and meals is appropriate.
- Use the ChooseMyPlate and the chart on page 2 for children as the basis for planning your meals and snacks.

For additional information on ChooseMyPlate for preschoolers, go to www.choosemyplate.gov/kids.

Originally prepared by Katherine Cason, associate professor of food science

Updated in 2014 by Jill Cox, MS, RD, program development specialist, Penn State Better Kid Care and Mary Alice Gettings, MS, RD, nutrition consultant with funding from the Penn State Extension Better Kid Care program.

Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences research and extension programs are funded in part by Pennsylvania counties, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

The University is committed to equal access to programs, facilities, admission and employment for all persons. It is the policy of the University to maintain an environment free of harassment and free of discrimination against any person because of age, race, color, ancestry, national origin, religion, creed, service in the uniformed services (as defined in state and federal law), veteran status, sex, sexual orientation, marital or family status, pregnancy, pregnancy-related conditions, physical or mental disability, gender, perceived gender, gender identity, genetic information or political ideas. Discriminatory conduct and harassment, as well as sexual misconduct and relationship violence, violates the dignity of individuals, impedes the realization of the University’s educational mission, and will not be tolerated. Direct all inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policy to Dr. Kenneth Lehrman III, Vice Provost for Affirmative Action, Affirmative Action Office, The Pennsylvania State University, 328 Boucke Building, University Park, PA 16802-5901, email: kfl2@psu.edu, phone: 814-863-0471.

© The Pennsylvania State University 2014