



Helping Your 1 to 3 Year Old Child Eat Well

How much food does my child need?

Appetites of young children can change from one day to the next. As a parent or caregiver you decide:

- what foods are offered;
- when to serve meals and snacks; and
- where to serve meals and snacks.

Your child decides:

- which foods to eat from the ones that are offered; and
- how much to eat.

Start by offering your child small amounts of food and let them ask for more. Your child will show you when they are hungry or full.

Sometimes, your child will be hungry and eat a lot. Other times, they will not eat very much. This is normal. Do not pressure or bribe your child to eat or to finish a meal if they are no longer hungry.

If you have questions about your child's growth or appetite, talk to your health care provider.

What foods do I offer my child?

Offer your child the same healthy foods that you and the rest of your family enjoy. Give your child foods with different flavours and textures from all 4 food groups. The 4 food groups are:

- Vegetables and fruit
- Grain products
- Milk and alternatives
- Meat and alternatives

Make sure that the foods you offer are prepared with little or no added salt or sugar. Include healthy foods that are higher in fat like salmon, avocado, cheese, and nut butters.

For more information on the 4 food groups, visit Eating Well With Canada's Food Guide at

www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guides.html. For meal and snack ideas see [HealthLinkBC File #69e Meal and Snack Ideas for Your 1 to 3 Year Old Child](#).

What do I offer my child to drink?

Water is the best drink when your child is thirsty. Offer water in between meals and snacks.

You can continue to offer breastmilk until your child is 2 years old or longer.

Your child can drink pasteurized (pas-chur-ized) whole cow milk (3.25% milk fat) at meals and snacks. Offer 500 mL (2 cups) every day if your child no longer breastfeeds.

Limit milk to no more than 750 mL (3 cups) every day. Drinking too much milk fills your child's tummy. This leaves less room for foods that have important nutrients like iron – foods like meat, legumes, infant cereal or cooked tofu.

Lower fat milks (skim, 1%, 2%), fortified soy beverages, rice and almond drinks are not recommended before your child is 2 years old. They are too low in fat and other nutrients your child needs. If your child does not drink whole cow milk, talk to your health care provider about what you can offer.

Children do not need juice or sugary drinks. These include pop, sports drinks, fruit beverages and fruit flavored drinks made from powders or crystals. If you give your child juice, offer them no more than 125 mL (1/2 cup) of 100% fruit juice per day. For dental health, it is better to have juice only with meals.

Do not give your child drinks with caffeine or artificial sweeteners.

Use an open cup instead of a "sippy" cup or bottle when you give your child a drink. An open cup will help your child learn to drink. It also lowers the risk of tooth decay.

When should I serve food to my child?

Give your child up to 3 small meals and 1 to 2 snacks during the day. Try to serve meals and snacks at about the same time every day. A schedule of meals and snacks can help your child develop healthy eating habits.

Your child may take longer to eat than you. Give them time to finish eating. If your child shows you that they are done eating by playing with the food, let them leave the table to enjoy a book or a toy.

What if my child doesn't want to eat?

How much your child wants to eat is affected by:

- their mood (tired, upset or excited);
- their health;
- the time of day;
- the type of food offered; and
- how active they are.

It's okay if your child sometimes doesn't eat or eats very little. A skipped meal or snack won't harm a healthy child. Saying "no" is also your child's way of having choice or freedom.

If your child can't settle down to eat, plan some quiet time before the meal or snack. Keep meal times calm and turn off the TV, cell phones, tablets and computers.

Using dessert or a favourite food as a reward for eating isn't needed. If your child doesn't like a food, or doesn't want to eat, remove the food and offer a healthy snack 1 to 2 hours later.

What can I do to help my child eat well?

Sit and eat with your child.

Show your child what eating healthy is like. You are your child's best role model. They will learn to eat and explore new foods by watching what you do.

Offer new foods many times.

Children often need to see, smell, and touch a food many times before tasting it. Your child may need to

taste a food many times before they eat it. Continue to offer new foods and include foods your child has refused in the past.

Give your child enough time to eat.

Young children learn by touching, smelling and looking at foods. Give your child time to learn about the foods you offer. Learning to use a spoon and fork also takes time. Plan time to sit and eat slowly with your child. A mess is also part of learning how to eat.

Try offering the same food in different ways.

Be patient. Keep giving your child foods made in different ways: raw, cooked (steamed, roasted), in stews, soups and sauces. If your child likes vegetables cooked a certain way, give them other vegetables made that same way.

Offer new foods with foods your child already likes.

Offer new foods often and serve them with at least 1 food that your child likes. If your child doesn't want to eat, or eats very little at a meal, offer a healthy snack 1 to 2 hours later. Making a different meal for your child will not help them become a healthy eater.

Sometimes young children only want to eat the same foods over and over again. This is normal and may last for a few weeks or months. If the "favourite" food is healthy, continue to offer it along with a variety of other healthy foods. If the "favourite" food is a less healthy option, give it to your child less often.

Allergies

If you have questions or concerns about food allergies, talk to your child's doctor, pediatrician, a registered dietitian, or a public health nurse.

For More Information

For more information on meal and snack ideas, visit Toddler's First Steps www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2015/toddlers-first-steps-2015.pdf (PDF 7.68 MB)

For more nutrition information, call **8-1-1** to speak with a registered dietitian.