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# Food for the Toddler Years

## Some keys to good nutrition for toddlers (two to four year olds) include:

- Eat a variety of foods, including Grains, Vegetables, Fruits, Milk, and Meat & Beans groups of MyPyramid.
- Offer whole grain breads, cereal, crackers, rice, or pasta for at least half of the grain servings each day. For example, if the MyPyramid plan calls for 6 grain servings, make sure at least 3 of the 6 servings are from a whole grain.
- Vary the vegetables—eat all colors, including dark green and orange vegetables every week.
- Plan menus.
- Offer proper serving sizes and do not force children to finish their food.
- Make meal and snack times enjoyable.
- Do not use food as a reward or to comfort, and do not withhold food as a form of punishment routinely.

## MyPyramid for Toddlers

### Recommended Servings

*Recommended servings are based on a 1400 calorie diet. A toddler's needs will vary depending on age, sex, and activity level. To create an individual plan for your toddler, go to [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) and click on the link to MyPyramid Plan.*

**Milk Group**—2 cups per day; be sure to choose lower fat selections.

Count as 1 cup: 1 cup (8 ounces) 1% or skim milk; 1 cup low-fat yogurt; 2 cups low-fat or fat-free cottage cheese; 1½ cups low-fat or fat-free ice cream;

1½ ounces of low-fat hard cheese (cheddar, mozzarella, Swiss, or parmesan); 1/3 cup shredded cheese; 2 ounces processed cheese (American); 1 cup pudding (made with milk).

**Meat and Beans Group**—4 ounce equivalents (or the amount of a food that has a similar nutrition value as 4 ounces of meat).

Count as 1 ounce equivalent: 1 ounce lean meat, fish, or poultry; 1 egg; 1 slice lunch meat; 1 tablespoon peanut butter; 1/4 cup cooked kidney, pinto, or garbanzo beans.

**Fruit Group**—1.5 cups

Count as 1 cup: 1 cup (8 ounces) 100% juice; 1 medium banana or orange; 1 small apple; 1 cup canned fruit, or ½ cup of dried fruit.

**Vegetable Group**—1.5 cups

Count as 1 cup: 1 cup cooked vegetables; 2 cups raw leafy vegetables; 1 cup (8 ounces) 100% juice.

**Grain Group**—5 ounce equivalents (or the amount of a food that has a similar nutrition value to 6 ounces of a grain).

Count as 1 ounce equivalent: 1 slice bread; 1 cup ready-to-eat cereal; 1/2 cup cooked cereal, rice, or pasta, 1/2 “mini” bagel, 1 small tortilla, 6 inches in diameter; 1 pancake, 4½ inches in diameter.

**Oils**—4 teaspoons

Common portions: 1 tablespoon oil = 3 teaspoons; 1 tablespoon margarine = 2.5 teaspoons; 1 tablespoon mayonnaise = 2.5 teaspoons; 1 ounce nuts = 3 teaspoons; 2 tablespoons salad dressing = 2 teaspoons; 1/2 avocado = 3 teaspoons; and 4 large olives (0.5 teaspoon).

Most cakes, pies, cookies, soft drinks, sugar, honey, candy, jams, jellies, gravies, butter, and sour cream have either an oil or solid fat and may be loaded with simple sugars. Eat them in moderation; save them to eat only if the toddler needs extra calories after eating the basic needed foods.

<b>MyPyramid</b>	
<b><i>A Guide to Daily Food Choices for the Toddler</i></b>	
Oils	4 teaspoons
Milk, Yogurt, and Cheese (Milk) Group	2 cups
Vegetable Group	1.5 cups
Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs, and Nuts (Meat and Beans) Group	4 ounce equivalents
Fruit Group	1.5 cups
Grain Group	5 ounce equivalents

**For times when one food, or group of foods, is the only item a child will eat:**

- The food may be peanut butter, cereal, bananas, or some other favorite.
- This is normal and the child will grow out of it.
- Often the child is in a resting stage of the growth process.
- The best way to get through this period is to offer the child many foods, providing his or her special food now and then.
- When the child is hungry, he or she will eat, no matter what food is served.

Updated by Julie Shertzler, Program Specialist, Human Nutrition, July 2008.

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**Choices for a healthy future:**

- Eating should be a good experience.
  - Some children do not want to try new foods.
  - Try to offer just one new food at a time and do not mix foods.
  - Serving one favorite food with one new food often helps a child to try the new food.
  - Try to offer fun foods that children can eat with their fingers.
  - Let the toddlers help to prepare the foods. Little ones can sprinkle cheese, place raisins on top, spread peanut butter, use cookie cutters to form unique shapes in bread, shake up beverages, and roll up tortillas.
  - Keep a bowl of fruit on the table, counter, or refrigerator so children can view it as an option.
- Good food at a young age plays a role later in life, and our children are only toddlers once.

**Resources**

- Jana, L.A. and Shu, J. (2008). *Food Fights: Winning the Nutritional Challenges of Parenthood Armed with Insight, Humor, and a Bottle of Ketchup*. Elk Grove Village: American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Satter, E. (1987). *How to Get Your Kid to Eat ... But Not Too Much*. Palo Alto: Bull Publishing.
- Satter, Ellyn. (2005). *Your Child's Weight: Helping Without Harming*. Palo Alto: Bull Publishing.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2005). *MyPyramid*. Retrieved June 2005 from: [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)
- Ward, E. (2005). *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Feeding Your Baby and Toddler*. New York: Penguin Books.

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