

# FEEDING YOUNG CHILDREN

(ONE TO FIVE YEARS)



Having up-to-date information about feeding your child is important to help them meet their nutritional needs and develop a positive relationship with food.

This factsheet has information to help your child get the nutrition needed for healthy growth and development.

For vegans or food approaches that may restrict a variety of foods or a whole food grouping, speak with a registered dietitian at Health811 by calling 811.

If your child has a medical condition that affects their nutritional needs, speak to your child's health care provider.

## CREATE A MEAL AND SNACK ROUTINE

Now that your child is a toddler, offer a meal and snack routine that includes three meals and two to three snacks each day.

Space meals and snacks about two and a half to three hours apart. Leaving time between meals and snacks allows your child to turn their attention to other activities and helps to build an appetite and interest in eating.

If you allow your child to snack frequently or drink beverages other than water between meals and snacks, they will be less hungry at mealtimes and may display picky eating behaviours.

## YOUR CHILD KNOWS HOW MUCH TO EAT

Your child's tummy is small and many things such as growth spurts or teething can affect their appetite. It is expected that appetites will be up and down. If you allow your child to decide how much to eat and respect their signs of fullness, they will eat the right amount for their needs.

### Signs of fullness

Your child may show you they are no longer interested in eating when they:

- Stop feeding themselves
- Turn their attention to things other than eating
- Push food away or throw it on the floor
- Lean back away from food or try to get out of the highchair or booster seat
- Use words such as "no", "all done" or "down"

### Your job is to decide

- When to eat
- What foods to offer
- Where to eat (such as upright in a booster chair at the table for meals and snacks, without distractions)

### Trust your child to know

- How much to eat
- Which foods to eat from what you offer

## ENJOY EATING TOGETHER

Eating with your child is a good opportunity to role model healthy eating that can have a positive impact on their eating.

Try serving foods family-style (food placed in serving dishes at the table) so they can pick which foods and how much from what is on the table.

### Keep mealtimes relaxed

Meals that are stress-free and without pressure help children to enjoy family time together and help to develop positive feelings about food and eating. Have pleasant conversation and avoid talking about how much or little they eat.

### Avoid distractions

Put away toys and turn off electronic devices (cell phones, tablets, TV) while your child is eating. Distractions take away the focus from eating and can have a negative impact on your child's eating.

### Encourage your child to feed themselves

While it may be tempting to feed your child, unless it is a food such as a soup where they may still need help, allow and encourage your child to self-feed. If they have not learned to do this yet, it is important to give opportunity every time they eat to learn the skill to self-feed. They will be messy but with time and practice, it will get better.



## MEAL PLAN USING CANADA'S FOOD GUIDE

### Offer the same foods as what you eat

Offer foods the rest of the family eats and adjust the size and texture to allow your child to feed themselves safely.

When meal planning for the family, consider [Canada's Food Guide](#) and include a:

- Vegetable or fruit (or both)
- Protein food (consider iron-rich ones)
- Whole grain

### Iron is important for growth and development

Offer iron-rich foods at least two times each day to help them meet their iron needs. Since plant-based sources of iron are not absorbed as well as animal sources, offer iron-rich foods more often if your child is vegetarian. Good sources include:

- Beans (white, red, lima, baked, navy)
- Beef and other meat (lamb, pork)
- Chicken and dark-meat turkey
- Eggs
- Fish (choose low-mercury most often)
- Iron-fortified cereals
- Lentils and peas (black-eyed peas, chickpeas)
- Soy-based foods (tofu, tempeh, edamame)

Vitamin C (vegetables and fruit) will help absorb iron from plant-based sources so include a vegetable or fruit (or both) when your child eats.

### Reduce the risk of choking

In addition to having your child seated at the table without distraction when eating, keep your child safe by avoiding foods that are:

- Hard, small and round (whole grapes, raw carrots, nuts, fruit with pits, hot dogs)
- Smooth and sticky (nut butter by spoon)

You can make some unsafe foods safer by:

- Grating or cooking raw vegetables
- Cutting grapes in quarters
- Removing pits from fruit
- Thinly spreading nut butters or mixing into food

## Food safety

Young children are at higher risk for food poisoning. Here are things you can do to lower the risk:

- Wash hands before preparing food and after touching raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood
- Clean surfaces and plates as soon as they have been in contact with raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood
- Store food safely and follow [this guide](#) for safe cooking and what to do with leftovers
- Wash fresh fruit and vegetables under cool, running, drinkable water

There are also some foods to avoid. They include:

- Raw or unpasteurized milk
- Unpasteurized fruit juice and cider
- Raw or lightly cooked eggs (or as an ingredient)
- Raw or undercooked meat or poultry
- Raw seafood, such as sushi
- Raw sprout, such as alfalfa, clover and radish

If your child eats fish and seafood, offer ones that are lower in mercury.

## Other tips when meal planning

- Be mindful of their likes, but do not cater to them. For example, include at least one food you know your child will eat
- If your child does not eat what you offered, do not go back to the kitchen to get other food
- Offer a variety of foods with different textures, colours and shapes
- Flavour food with herbs and spices instead of salt or sugar
- Limit or avoid highly processed toddler foods that are not a part of Canada's Food Guide, including rice rusks and food puffs

## DRINKS MATTER

### Milk

Breastmilk (human milk) can continue to be their main milk source for as long as you and your child want. If you offer breastmilk, give a daily vitamin D supplement of 400 IU D until two years of age.

If your child's milk source is not breastmilk, offer 3.25% M.F. cow's milk since infant formula is generally not needed past 12 months of age. At two years of age, switch to skim, 1% or 2% M.F. Before two years of age, plant-based beverages (soy, oat, almond, rice, coconut) are not recommended as their main milk source. If a soy product is offered before two years of age, offer soy-based infant formula.

For two years of age and older, a full-fat, unflavoured, unsweetened, fortified soy beverage is an option as their main milk source. If you offer other plant-based beverages, choose products that are labelled as "fortified" or "enriched" and provide the following per one cup (8 ounces or 250 mL):

- At least 6 g of protein
- At least 23% Daily Value (DV) of calcium (300 mg)
- At least 10% DV of vitamin D (80 IU or 2 mcg)
- Less than 15% DV of sugar (<15 g)



Whatever the milk source, offer two cups (16 ounces or 500 mL) daily. Small servings ½ cup (four ounces or 125 mL) in an open cup at meal and snack times will help to avoid filling up on milk.

Limit the amount of milk to no more than three cups (24 ounces or 750 mL) daily since too much milk can fill small tummies and cause iron levels to go down.

### Water and other beverages

Water is a good option to offer when your child is thirsty and is a good way to help your child learn the skill of drinking from an open cup. Offer water as desired between meals to help them meet their fluid needs.

It is best to avoid other beverages, including juice and other sugary beverages.

By 18 months, offer all beverages by open cup.

### BABY TEETH ARE IMPORTANT

Take care of your child's baby teeth by helping to:

- Brush teeth gently, at least twice a day, using a small, soft toothbrush and water. Toothpaste is not recommended until your child is able to spit it out. When fluoride toothpaste is introduced, a pea-size amount on the toothbrush is enough
- Rinse their teeth with water when it is not possible to brush them
- Floss once a day

Visit the dentist for their first dental visit by their first birthday and then continue routine check-ups.



### BOWEL HABITS

How often and how much young children poop can vary. While some children have more than one poop a day, others might have a poop every couple of days.

#### Constipation

If your child has painful, very large poops or many small, pellet-like poops, you may wonder if they have constipation.

Since constipation can cause stomach pain, bloating, extra gassiness, poor appetite, low energy and crankiness, talk your child's healthcare professional if you think they are constipated. Do not try to make a diagnosis yourself.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For additional nutrition resources and videos, visit [york.ca/feedingkids](http://york.ca/feedingkids), [york.ca/breastfeeding](http://york.ca/breastfeeding) or [unlockfood.ca](http://unlockfood.ca)

For other York Region Public Health topics related to parenting, visit, [york.ca/parenting](http://york.ca/parenting)

For more information and support with feeding young children, call York Region **Health Connection** at 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-252-9933 or chat live at [york.ca/nursechat](http://york.ca/nursechat).

To speak to a registered dietitian at no cost, access Health811 by calling 811 or visiting [ontario.ca/health811](http://ontario.ca/health811)

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