

Growing A Happy, Healthy Child

Helping Your Toddler Learn About Food

Toddlers and preschoolers are unpredictable. The foods they like one day may be different the next. Here are practical answers to important nutrition questions from families.

What can I expect my child to do as he grows?

At 1 to 1-1/2 years old your child will

- Grasp and release foods with his fingers
- Be able to hold a spoon but won't be able to use it very well
- Be able to use a cup but will have difficulty letting go of it
- Want food that others are eating

At 1-1/2 to 2 years old your child will

- Eat less
- Like to eat with his hands
- Like routine
- Have favorite foods
- Get distracted easily
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At 3 to 4 years old your child will

- Be able to hold a cup by its handle
- Be able to pour liquids from a small pitcher
- Be able to use a fork
- Request favorite foods
- Like foods in various shapes and colors
- Have an increased interest in foods
- Be influenced by television
- Like to imitate the cook



At 4 to 5 years old your child will

- Be able to use a knife and fork
- Use a cup well
- Be able to feed herself
- Be more interested in talking than in eating
- Continue to have food jags (insisting on the same foods several days in a row)
- Like to prepare food
- Be interested in where food comes from
- Be more influenced by her peers

How can I teach my child healthy eating behaviors?

- Eat meals together as a family.
- Keep in mind that parents are responsible for offering a variety of healthy foods at regular meals and snacks. Let your child decide whether to eat and how much to eat.
- Offer a variety of healthy foods, and encourage your child to try different ones.
- Let your preschooler participate in food shopping and preparation.
- Do not use food to reward, bribe, or punish your child.
- Be a positive role model—practice healthy eating behaviors yourself.

How can I make mealtimes enjoyable?

- Be patient when your child makes a mess while she learns to feed herself – this is normal.
- Your child may struggle with you over food in an attempt to make decisions and become independent. Struggling over food may make her even more determined.
- Serve meals and snacks at scheduled times but allow for flexibility.
- Use your child's favorite plate, bowl, cup, and spoon.
- Create a relaxed setting for meals (for example, turn off the TV).



What should I give my child to drink?

- Your child may not tell you when he is thirsty. Make sure he drinks water often, especially between meals and snacks.
- Your child should drink about 2 cups (16 ounces total) of whole milk per day.
- Until age 2, do not give your child low-fat or fat-free milk.
- Offer juice in small amounts (4 to 8 ounces per day).
- Serve your child juice or milk in a cup, not a bottle.

What should I feed my child?

- For meals, offer small portions of what the family is eating – fruits and vegetables; bread, pasta or rice; cheese, yogurt, cooked lean meat, poultry, fish or eggs.
- Children under 2 usually eat small portions. Offer 1 or 2 tablespoons - and let your child ask for more if she is still hungry.
- Children 3 years old need the same number of servings as children 4 to 6, but they may need smaller portions—about 2/3 of a serving.
- Children 4 years old can eat serving sizes similar to those eaten by older family members: 1/2 cup of fruits or vegetables; 3/4 cup of juice; 1 slice of bread; 2 to 3 ounces of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish.
- Offer your toddler food every 2 to 3 hours for a snack or meal.

Any Day Sundae

Makes 1 Sundae

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Ingredients:

- 2 scoops (1/2 cup) frozen yogurt
- 1/2 cup sliced strawberries, blueberries, drained canned peaches or other favorite fruit
- 1 graham cracker square or 2 tablespoons crunchy cereal

Help your child:

Scoop frozen yogurt into a bowl, add the fruit, and crumble graham cracker or sprinkle the cereal on top. Enjoy!

