

# MEALS, SNACKS AND DRINKS FOR TODDLERS

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Meals: 1st course



2nd course



Snacks



Drinks



## LEARNING POINTS

### Meals

- 1 Most traditional British meals and those of other cultures combine foods from different food groups and make up a balanced nutritious diet
- 2 A quickly prepared cold meal, and a hot meal with the same combination of food groups, have the same nutritional quality

### Snacks

- 5 Toddlers are unlikely to eat enough food in just three meals alone, and two or three planned nutritious snacks are an important part of their daily diet and help to prevent grazing on food throughout the day

### Drinks

- 7 About six to eight drinks per day will maintain hydration – i.e. a drink with each meal and snack – and toddlers should have easy access to water at other times, particularly in hot weather or after a lot of physical activity
- 8 Drinks of 100-120ml or 3-4oz are adequate to offer toddlers and water is a good choice

- 3 A second course offered at the midday and evening meals makes them more interesting and widens the range of nutrients offered
- 4 Family meals are ideal opportunities for parents and carers to role model food preferences and eating behaviours that they would like their toddlers to copy

- 6 Nutritious snacks combine foods from Food Groups 1-5

- 9 Cups and beakers without valved spouts are best for drinks – bottles should be discontinued from about 12 months of age
- 10 Sweet and acidic drinks, including squashes and fruit juices, can damage the teeth and are not a necessary source of vitamin C, which can be provided by fruit and vegetables. They should be limited to once per week and served with a meal.

# MEALS, SNACKS AND DRINKS FOR TODDLERS

A nutritionally balanced diet containing a combination of different foods is one of the foundations of child health. Poor diets can lead to obesity, dental decay, iron deficiency and constipation, which are all common in the UK.

See Factsheet 4.1

Eating patterns have changed over the last few decades, with the availability of a widening range of convenience foods, greater ethnic and cultural diversity of the population, and less time spent

preparing food in the home. Today's parents can find it difficult to make informed decisions about feeding their young children, and be uncertain or confused about which foods to offer them to protect their health and ensure proper growth and development.

The principles of combining foods from different food groups to provide a balanced nutritious diet are outlined in Factsheet 1.2. Factsheet 1.3 provides guidance on portion sizes for young children and Factsheet 1.9 how to choose nutritious, fresh or convenience foods. Factsheet 1.5 provides advice on planning menus for families with toddlers. This Factsheet provides ideas and tips for family meals, snacks and drinks that can make for a balanced nutritious diet for toddlers.

Parents/carers should offer their toddlers nutritious meals and snacks of appropriate portion sizes but allow them to decide how much they eat. See Factsheet 1.7 Sweet foods should be limited to small portions as most toddlers will readily eat more of them than they need. To protect teeth, food and any drinks containing sugar should be limited to four times a day; i.e. three meals and no more than one snack.

## MEALS

Most traditional meals from Britain, and those eaten in other cultures, contain ideal combinations of foods from the five food groups. Hot and cold meals with the same food group combination have the same nutritional quality.

Convenience foods can be part of a balanced meal but usually need extra vegetables or fruit served alongside to improve the balance of the food group combination. See Factsheet 1.9

The five food groups See Factsheet 1.2 are:

- 1 Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods,
- 2 Fruit and vegetables,
- 3 Milk, cheese and yogurt,
- 4 Meat, fish, eggs, nuts and pulses,
- 5 Oils, butter and fat spread

Examples of traditional family meals that combine foods from different food groups are:



## BREAKFASTS

Nutritious breakfasts combine:

- A starchy food such as bread or breakfast cereal
- Milk, yogurt, cheese, egg, meat or fish
- Fruit

Breakfasts	Include Food Groups
Breakfast cereal fortified with vitamins and minerals + milk/yogurt + some fresh or dried fruit + water to drink	1, 2, 3
Baked beans on buttered toast + clementine segments	1, 2, 4, 5
Egg + toast + pieces of fruit + water to drink	1, 2, 4
Flatbreads e.g. parathas + slices of fruit + milk to drink	1, 2, 3
Grilled bacon sandwich + tomatoes + water to drink	1, 2, 4
Pancakes + sliced fruit + honey, jam or syrup + milk to drink	1, 2, 3, 5
Porridge + milk/yogurt + some fresh or dried fruit + water to drink	1, 2, 3
Toasted crumpets, hot cross buns or tea bread + butter + fruit pieces + hot chocolate milk to drink	1, 2, 3, 5
Toast or a bagel + cheese spread or cream cheese + fruit slices + water to drink	1, 2, 3
Toast with butter and jam + fruit slices + a glass of milk	1, 2, 3, 5
Toast with peanut butter + fruit slices + a glass of milk	1, 2, 3, 4

## SAVOURY COURSES FOR MIDDAY AND EVENING MEALS

### Savoury courses – providing foods from Food Groups 1, 2, 4 & 5

#### Courses with meat

Bacon quiche with 1-2 vegetables
Beef Stroganoff with rice and 1-2 vegetables
Lean meat burger in a bun with 1-2 vegetables
Meat and vegetable curry with rice/chapatti/naan bread
Meat and vegetable stew or casserole with potato, pasta or rice
Meat or bean lasagne and an extra vegetable on the side
Moussaka with a vegetable
Pizza with a meat topping and salad vegetables
Roast meat, roast potatoes and 1-2 vegetables
Sausage, mashed potato and 1-2 vegetables
Shepherd's pie and 1-2 vegetables
Spaghetti bolognese including meat in the sauce and an extra vegetable on the side
Steak and kidney pie with 1-2 vegetables
Sweet and sour chicken with rice and 1-2 vegetables
Tortilla/pancake with meat and vegetable filling

#### Courses with fish

Fish and pasta bake with 1-2 vegetables
Fish and potato cakes and 1-2 vegetables
Fish and potato pie and 1-2 vegetables
Fish and vegetable curry with rice
Fish fingers and chips and 1-2 vegetables
Jacket potato with tuna mayonnaise and sweetcorn
Poached or baked fish with rice/potatoes and 1-2 vegetables

#### Courses with meat or fish

Meat/fish and vegetable kebabs such as chicken and vegetable skewers
Risotto with meat/fish and 1-2 vegetables
Stir-fried vegetables with meat or fish and rice

#### Vegetarian meals using eggs

Potato frittata with a vegetable or salad
Scrambled eggs on toast with tomatoes or another vegetable
Vegetable omelette served with bread, potato, rice or pasta

#### Vegetarian meals using pulses

Baked beans on toast with 1-2 vegetables
Dhal with rice/chapattis and a vegetable
Falafel burgers with a vegetable
Jacket potato with baked beans and a vegetable
Lentil and vegetable soup with bread/toast
Minestrone soup
Pasta with vegetable sauce including lentils or chick peas
Rice and peas with an extra vegetable

### Savoury courses – providing foods from Food Groups 1, 2, 3 & 5

Jacket potato with cheese and 1-2 vegetables
Leek and potato soup with grated cheese
Macaroni cheese and salad vegetables on the side
Pizza with vegetable only topping; served with salad
Quesadilla with cheese and vegetable filling
Toasted sandwich or panini with cheese and tomato/other vegetable
Tomato/vegetable soup with a bread roll with cheese
Vegetable pasta bake with cheese
Vegetable quiche



#### Tips

- Serve seasonal vegetables or use frozen vegetables to keep costs down
- Toddlers often prefer the sweeter taste of stir-fried vegetables or roasted vegetables to the more bitter taste of steamed or boiled vegetables
- Some toddlers refuse vegetables, but parents should keep offering them while eating them themselves, because after being offered a particular vegetable at about 10-15 different meals toddlers may try it. [See Factsheet 1.7](#)
- Toddlers are more likely to try new foods when they see their parents, carers or siblings eating them. [See Factsheet 1.7](#)
- Some toddlers like different foods kept separate from each other so that they are not touching
- Some toddlers prefer dry food, such as dry pasta with the sauce served separately, rather than all mixed together
- Use herbs and spices rather than salt to add more flavour to meals.

## QUICK COLD MEALS

A cold savoury course can be prepared quickly by just putting a food from three or four of the Food Groups 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 together on a plate. They are just as nutritious as hot meals.

Food Group 1 Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods	Food Group 2 Fruit and vegetables	Food Group 3 Milk, cheese and yogurt	Food Group 4 Meat, fish, eggs, nuts and pulses	Food Group 5 Oils, butter and fat spread
Bread or bread rolls	Avocado slices	Cream cheese or cheese spread	Boiled egg wedges	Butter and fat spreads
Bread sticks	Carrot sticks		Canned fish mixed with mayonnaise and plain yogurt e.g. tuna, sardines, salmon	Oil in salad dressings
Chapatti	Celery sticks	Cheese straws or triangles	Cold roast meat leftovers	Mayonnaise
Crackers or crisp bread			Cherry tomatoes cut in half	
Naan bread	Courgette sticks or slices	Glass of milk	Falafels	
Pasta salad			Cucumber slices or sticks	
Pitta bread/wraps/ flat bread	Pepper sticks or slices	Hard cheese cubes	Hummus	
Potato salad			Tomato wedges	
Rice cakes		Tzatziki or yogurt dip	Slices of liver sausage or liver pâté	
Rice salad			Smoked fish fillets e.g. mackerel, salmon, trout	
			Vegetarian sausages or pâtés containing pulses	

### Examples of quick cold meals

- Cold chicken with tomato wedges, green pepper sticks and a slice of buttered bread
- Pieces of ham, celery and carrot sticks with oatcakes or crackers
- Slices of salami with cucumber slices, cherry tomatoes and rice cakes
- Hummus and cucumber slices with fresh or toasted pitta bread.

Alternatively a food or mixtures of two or three foods can be used as fillings for sandwiches, bread rolls, tortillas or pitta breads, or toppings on toast, crackers, rice cakes or crisp breads.

### Tip

- Some toddlers do not like mixtures of food in sandwiches. They prefer one food as the filling, with vegetable sticks or slices on the side; e.g. a hummus sandwich with red pepper sticks on the side.

### Examples of fillings or toppings

- Cold meat such as ham, lean salami or cold roast meat with lettuce or tomato
- Liver pâté or liver sausage with cucumber slices
- Peanut or another nut butter with mashed banana or jam
- 1 tbsp drained tinned tuna with 1 tsp mayonnaise and 1 tsp plain yogurt
- 1 tbsp tinned sardines with a squeeze of lemon juice
- 1 tbsp of smoked fish such as smoked mackerel or smoked trout mixed with ½ tbsp of plain yogurt and ½ tbsp of mayonnaise
- Fish pastes or pâtés such as mackerel or salmon pâté
- Smoked salmon slices
- 1 tbsp hummus mixed with ½ tbsp finely diced red pepper
- Bean spreads such as black bean spread
- Mashed avocado or guacamole
- Grated hard cheese with sliced tomatoes
- 1 tbsp cream cheese with ½ tsp chopped herbs such as chives or parsley
- 1 tbsp cream cheese with a scrape of marmite.

## SECOND COURSES (PUDDINGS) FOR MIDDAY AND EVENING MEALS

A second course makes a meal more interesting for all the family and widens the range of nutrients offered. Ideally this course should have fruit and be limited to one small serving when it includes foods high in fat and sugar from Food Group 5.

Second Courses	Food Groups Included
Yogurt with fruit	2, 3
Fresh fruit or tinned fruit with yogurt or evaporated milk	2, 3
Fresh fruit with cream such as strawberries and cream	2, 5
Rice pudding served with fruit	1, 2, 3
<b>Limit these with sugar to once per day</b>	
Bakewell tart served with fruit slices	1, 2, 4, 5
Bread and butter pudding including dried fruit	1, 2, 3, 5
Egg custard tart with fruit slices	1, 2, 3, 5
Fresh fruit with a biscuit or piece of cake or chocolate buttons	1, 2, 5
Quick mixed milk puddings such as Angel Delight™ served with some fruit slices	2, 3
Sponge cake with custard	1, 3, 5
Fruit crumble with custard	1, 2, 3, 5
Fruit pie with custard	1, 2, 3, 5
Fruit salad with ice cream	2
Fruit sponge cakes such as Apple Charlotte	1, 2, 5
Jelly with fruit pieces	2
Other fruit based puddings such as summer pudding	1, 2, 5

### Tips

- Toddlers are more likely to eat fruit that is cut up into small pieces and offered as finger foods
- Fruit tinned in water or its own juice is preferable for toddlers than fruit tinned in syrup which is much higher in added sugar
- Some toddlers may prefer the foods served separately; e.g. the yogurt/custard in a small bowl and the fruit or cake on a plate on the side rather than the yogurt/custard mixed into the fruit pieces or on top of the cake
- [See Factsheet 1.3](#) for suitable portion sizes.

## SNACKS

Toddlers are unlikely to consume enough energy and nutrients in just three meals per day and therefore need two or three planned nutritious snacks per day in addition to their meals.

### Nutritious snacks provide a combination of foods from Food Groups 1-4 such as:

- Fresh fruit (dried fruit sticks to teeth and can cause dental decay, and should be limited to mealtimes)
- Vegetable sticks e.g. carrot, cucumber, pepper, baby corn with dips based on yogurt, cream cheese or pulses in such dishes as hummus
- Wholegrain breakfast cereals with milk
- Cheese cubes and crackers/breadsticks or chapatti
- Sandwiches, filled rolls and pitta breads with fillings (as listed on page 4)
- Vegetable bhajis
- Toast and French toast with a spread
- Slices of pizza with a plain dough base that has not been fried
- Yogurt and fromage frais
- Crumpets, scones, pitta bread with a spread
- Currant buns and teacakes\*
- Pancakes, fruit muffins and plain biscuits\*
- Homemade plain popcorn
- Cakes containing dried fruit or vegetables or nuts e.g. fruit cake and carrot cake.\*

Spreads include butter, jam\*, honey\*, peanut butter, chocolate spread\*, cream cheese, cottage cheese.

\* indicates snacks or spreads that contain added sugar and must be restricted to no more than one snack a day.

### Tips

- Plan snacks so that they are offered about half way between meals, taking into account sleep patterns
- By planning set snack times, toddlers will not graze on food throughout the day which is bad for their teeth. [See Factsheet 4.5](#)
- Unplanned snacks are usually high energy foods that contribute to obesity. [See Factsheet 3.3](#) If they are also high sugar foods they increase the likelihood of dental decay. [See Factsheet 4.5](#)

# DRINKS

Fluids are an essential component of the diet to maintain hydration. They aid digestion and absorption and protect against constipation.



Glass containing 100ml or 3oz of water.

Toddlers should be offered 6-8 drinks per day; one drink with each meal and snack. In addition they should have easy access to water throughout the day, particularly after extra physical activity or in hot weather.

Bottles should be discontinued by about 12 months of age and all drinks given in cups or beakers. Only valve-free spouts should be used so that the toddler is sipping, not sucking. About 100-120ml or 3-4 oz is a suitable sized drink to offer toddlers.

## WATER

Water is a good choice because it contains no sugar or acid and will not damage the teeth.

Tap water and most bottled waters must comply with strict safety guidelines. Mineral waters may have slightly higher levels of some minerals, including sodium, but are all safe for toddlers. Fizzy water or carbonated water has carbon dioxide dissolved into it to create the bubbles. This makes it very slightly acidic.

# MILKS

Whole (full fat) cows' milk should not be given as a drink to infants under a year<sup>1</sup>. From 12 months toddlers can have whole milk as their milk drink. It contains very little iron and should be limited to a maximum of three drinks of 100-120ml per day, or less if toddlers are eating cheese and yogurt (which also provide calcium but are low in iron).



Cup containing 100ml or 3oz of milk.

Skimmed and semi-skimmed milks contain less vitamin A and less energy (calories) than whole milk because of their lower fat content. They contain the same amount of protein, lactose (carbohydrate), calcium and other nutrients as whole milk.

Toddlers up to the age of two years should drink whole milk because of the higher vitamin A content. From two years they can change to semi-skimmed milk if they are eating well but this change is not necessary<sup>1</sup>. A glass of 100-120ml semi-skimmed milk has only 22 fewer calories than a drink of whole milk – this is a very small percentage of a toddler's daily intake of 800-1100 kcal.

Skimmed milk is not suitable for children under five years of age because of its very low vitamin A content<sup>1</sup>.

Formula milks for toddlers are enriched with extra nutrients such as vitamin D and iron and can provide a more nutritious milk drink for toddlers who do not eat well. [See Factsheets 4.4 & 4.7](#)

Drink of 100-120ml <sup>2</sup>	Protein (g)	Fat (g)	Energy (kcal)	Vitamin A (µg)	Calcium (mg)
Whole milk	3.4	3.9	73	40	130
Semi-skimmed milk	3.4	1.7	51	22	132
Skimmed milk	3.4	0.2	35	1	134

### Alternatives to milk for toddlers with an allergy or intolerance to cows' milk

- Drinks based on Soya, nuts and cereals contain sugar. They do not contain all the nutrients milk provides – in particular calcium, iodine, vitamin A and riboflavin. If used, choose one that is fortified with all these nutrients or seek advice on a suitable supplement that will provide them.
- Rice milk is not recommended for children under five years as it may contain very small amounts of arsenic.

## SWEET DRINKS

All drinks sweetened with sugar, or naturally sweet with fruit sugar (e.g. fruit juices and smoothies) can cause dental decay. Most are also acidic, which can damage teeth by eroding the tooth enamel. They are best avoided but if used should be well diluted and only served at meal times. [See Factsheet 4.5](#)

**Flavoured milks** and yogurt drinks have added sugar but are slightly less damaging to teeth than other sweet drinks because the calcium in the milk gives teeth some protection against dental decay.



**Fruit juices** are high calorie drinks that are sugary and acidic. They provide very few nutrients, and can damage teeth. They are not a necessary part of toddlers' diets because children can obtain adequate vitamin C by eating fruit and/or vegetables. If offered to toddlers, fruit juices should be well diluted – one part juice to about six to ten parts water – and limited to mealtimes only.

**Fruit smoothies**, like fruit juices, are high in sugar and are acidic. About 100-120ml or 3-4oz could be served as an alternative to a sugar-containing pudding.

**Squashes** are usually artificially flavoured and sweetened with sugar and/or sweeteners. They are also acidic and can damage the teeth.

**Fizzy sweet drinks** are sweetened with either sugar and/or sweeteners. They contain little or no nutrients and are very acidic causing damage to teeth.

**Diet drinks**, zero calorie drinks and no added sugar drinks usually contain sweeteners. They are all acidic and as potentially damaging to teeth as are other sweet drinks.

**Tea and coffee** contain caffeine and are unsuitable for young children. Tea contains tannins that reduce the absorption of iron from food so should not be given at meal times.

**Herbal teas** are suitable for toddlers, but if they are sweetened with sugar or honey they should be limited as are other sweet drinks.

## VITAMIN D SUPPLEMENT

In the UK a balanced diet and sunlight will not necessarily provide toddlers with sufficient amounts of vitamin D to prevent deficiency. A daily supplement of 10 micrograms of vitamin D is recommended for all children under five. Vitamin D supplements are also recommended for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. [See Factsheet 4.7](#)

### Tips

- Healthy Start children's vitamin drops are available from some NHS clinics and are free to families who qualify for Healthy Start vouchers. See [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk)
- A range of children's vitamin supplements are available in pharmacies and supermarkets. Choose one with 10µg vitamin D/daily dose
- Give only one child's dose each day.

### References

1. Department of Health: Weaning and The Weaning Diet. Report of the Working Group On The Weaning Diet of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy. Report on Health and Social Subjects 45. London: HMSO; 1994
2. Food Standards Agency. McCance & Widdowson's. The composition of foods, Sixth summary edition. Cambridge: The Royal Society of Chemistry, 2002

# MEALS, SNACKS AND DRINKS FOR TODDLERS GUIDANCE & TIPS FOR PARENTS



Midday and evening meals may be hot or cold – offer two courses. Nutritious meals and snacks combine foods from Food Groups 1-5. Small amounts of foods from Food Group 5 are used in food preparation. To protect teeth, foods containing sugar should be limited to mealtimes and no more than one snack per day.

## The food groups are:

- 1 Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods,
- 2 Fruit and vegetables,
- 3 Milk, cheese and yogurt,
- 4 Meat, fish, eggs, nuts and pulses,
- 5 Oils, butter and fat spreads.

## MEALS

### Nutritious breakfasts:

- Are based on a starchy food such as bread, toast or breakfast cereal
- Include milk, yogurt, cheese, egg or meat such as bacon or ham
- Include some fruit.

### Examples:

- Breakfast cereal with milk, plus some fruit pieces
- Egg with toast and some clementine segments.

### Savoury courses:

- Are based on starchy foods – bread, rice, potatoes or pasta
- Include vegetables cooked, raw or in sauces or soups
- Include a food from Food Groups 3 or 4 to provide some protein.

### Examples:

- Shepherd's pie served with one or two vegetables
- Ham pizza served with salad vegetables
- Dhal with rice and vegetables
- Tuna pasta bake with vegetables
- Leek and potato soup with grated cheese
- Meat or cheese sandwiches with raw vegetable sticks.

### Second courses:

- Include fruit on its own or
- Along with yogurt, fromage frais or custard. Once a day it could be a sweet pudding made with nutritious ingredients such as milk, flour, rice, bread, eggs or nuts.

### Examples:

- Yogurt with fruit
- Fresh fruit with a biscuit
- Fruit crumble with custard or ice cream
- Fruit sponge pudding
- Pancakes with pureed fruit or fruit pieces.

For personalised analysis of toddlers' food intake and activity levels, use the Infant & Toddler Forum's Tot It Up calculator [www.infantandtoddlerforum.org/toddler-food-calculator](http://www.infantandtoddlerforum.org/toddler-food-calculator)

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## SNACKS

Combine foods from Food Groups 1-4.

### Examples:

- Fresh fruit but not dried fruit
- Vegetable sticks, e.g. carrot, cucumber, pepper, baby corn with dips based on yogurt, cream cheese or pulses in such dishes as hummus
- Wholegrain breakfast cereals with milk
- Cheese cubes and crackers/breadsticks or chapatti
- Sandwiches, bread rolls and pitta breads with fillings
- Vegetable bhajis
- Slices of pizza with a plain dough base that has not been fried
- Yogurt and fromage frais
- Crumpets, scones, pitta bread, toast or French toast with a spread
- Currant buns and teacakes
- Pancakes, fruit muffins and plain biscuits\*
- Cakes containing dried fruit or vegetables or nuts, e.g. fruit cake and carrot cake.\*

Spreads include butter, jam\*, honey\*, nut butters, chocolate spread\*, cream cheese, cottage cheese.

\* indicates snacks or spreads that contain added sugar and must be limited to protect teeth.

## DRINKS

Offer to toddlers at each meal and snack – about 100-120ml or 3-4oz is adequate.

### Examples:

- Water is a good choice for meals and snacks and should also be available throughout the day especially in hot weather and after physical activity
- Milk does not damage teeth but should be limited to three drinks a day or less if toddlers are also eating yogurt and cheese
- Alternative drinks to milk based on soya, nuts or cereals all contain sugar and should not be used unless they are fortified with calcium, iodine, vitamins A and B2
- Sweet drinks including fruit juices, smoothies, squashes and fizzy drinks can all damage teeth because they contain sugar and acid. If used they should be limited to once per week and served with a meal
- Diet fizzy drinks and sugar free squashes are acidic and will also damage teeth.