



Feeding the under 3s
the food they need

Toddler meals: how much do they need?

Guidance & Tips for Parents

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THE FACTS

Toddlers need a healthy, varied and mixed diet to thrive and grow. During the day, toddlers should usually be offered three meals and two to three snacks. The foods they are given should be part of a well-balanced diet.

- Toddlers have smaller stomachs than adults and so need to eat smaller amounts of food more often. They should be offered three meals and two or three planned snacks a day
- Most toddlers quickly learn to control their food intakes to meet their energy needs for normal growth and development
- Like adults, children regulate their food intakes by feeling hungry when they need food and feeling full when they have eaten and drunk enough
- Forcing toddlers to eat when they do not want to, or withholding food that they like, can interfere with their food intake control
- Insisting that toddlers finish up what is on their plate can interfere with the food intake control
- Forcing your toddler to finish food that he or she does not like can make mealtimes stressful. This may cause your toddler to refuse food
- If your toddler does not finish the first course, remove the food without making any comment and move on to the next course
- There is no such thing as an 'ideal' portion size for all toddlers. A large active toddler will need more food than a smaller, less active child
- If your child is growing well and developing normally, then do not worry too much about their eating habits. Growth and development is a better indicator of appropriate food intake than mealtime behaviour
- Do not allow your toddler to 'graze' on food in between meals and snacks; they will not develop good control of food intake
- Do not withhold snacks to make your toddler 'hungry' for the next meal. This can upset his or her food intake control
- Do not say 'you can't have pudding until you've finished your first course'. This makes pudding seem even more desirable
- Do not use sweets or snacks as a reward because this will make these foods seem more desirable to your toddler
- Do not worry if your child is a fussy eater. He or she may still be in control of their food intake, although regulation may be week-to-week rather than day-to-day

