

# TODDLER MEALS: HOW MUCH DO THEY NEED? GUIDANCE & TIPS FOR PARENTS



- 1) Toddlers have smaller stomachs than adults and so need to eat smaller amounts of food more often. Offer three meals and two or three planned snacks a day but don't allow your toddler to 'graze' on food in between meals and snacks.
- 2) Most toddlers can control their food intake to meet their energy needs for normal growth and development.
- 3) Like adults, children regulate their food intake by feeling hungry when they need food and feeling full when they have eaten and drunk enough.
- 4) 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.
- 5) 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.
- 6) As toddlers get older they will copy others and respond to external cues to eat when they are not really hungry, be careful not to give portions that are too large for a child.
- 7) There are inborn differences between children in how likely they are to overeat when not hungry. Just because a child is asking for food it doesn't always mean that they really need it. Check their weight and height to see if your 'hungry' child is overeating, otherwise they may be at risk of becoming overweight.
- 8) 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. Make sure you allow them their preferred foods to prevent growth faltering.
- 9) • Making toddlers eat when they do not want to  
• Withholding food that they like  
• Insisting that they finish up what is on their plate  
• Withholding snacks to make them hungry for the next meal  
can upset his or her food intake control.
- 10) 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.
- 11) Don't say 'you can't have pudding until you've finished your first course' or use sweets or snacks as a reward because this will make these foods seem more desirable to your toddler. If your toddler does not finish the first course, remove the food without making any comment and move on to the next course.



The healthiest start in life  
from pregnancy to preschool

The Infant & Toddler Forum CIC is committed to a world where every child has the healthiest start in life

Copyright rests with the Infant & Toddler Forum CIC  
Infant & Toddler Forum CIC. Registered in England and Wales. Company limited by guarantee. Company no. 12303732