

A glass of milk is on the left side of the image. In the center, a white plate holds a sandwich cut into two halves, with layers of lettuce, tomato, and meat. To the right of the sandwich are several sticks of carrot and celery. The background is a solid light green color.

# Feeding Your 2 to 5 Year Old

Building Good Eating Habits



As a parent or caregiver, you are discovering that toddlers and preschoolers are very independent!

When your child was a baby, you fed her when she was hungry and she ate what you offered. **Very Simple.**

Feeding a young child is not quite so simple. She may want to eat the same food three days in a row—then refuse to touch it the next day. Perhaps she won't eat lunch, but 15 minutes later, she's begging for a cookie. She might insist on munching on crackers all afternoon, then pick at her dinner. What's going on?

During the toddler and preschool years, children go through some very important changes.

## Independence

He wants to do more for himself. This is not easy for him. He still wants the security of knowing you will always be there to help. His struggle for independence often shows up in the way he eats. He may refuse to eat a certain food or refuse to eat anything. Don't worry—this is normal.

## Growth

Now that he's older, your toddler or preschooler isn't growing as fast. Activity now plays an important role in his appetite and can cause appetite changes. He may often eat only one meal a day.

How can you cope?  
These changes can be upsetting, but the best thing you can do is relax. With your support and encouragement, your child will eat the food he needs for growth and development—without hassles or battles.

This booklet offers tips to help you and your child survive these changes and make eating more enjoyable and healthful.



# Dividing Eating Responsibilities With Your Child



## **Your jobs are to decide:**

**What** food is offered.

**When** the food is offered.

**Where** it will be eaten.

## **Your child's jobs are to decide:**

**If** she will eat or not.

**What** she will eat from the food offered.

**How** much she will eat.

Remember that it is very important to let your child do her jobs. This may seem difficult, particularly if your child seems to be eating poorly. However, when a young child eats poorly, the best way to help improve her eating behavior is to stick to your jobs and allow your child to do her jobs.

This booklet covers the details of your jobs: the What, When, and Where of feeding your young child.

# What Should I Feed My Child?

## Meals

Choosing food to serve your child is a very important job. Try to plan meals that include choices from four or five of the following food groups:

## Grains

Such as breads, crackers, biscuits, muffins, pancakes, noodles, spaghetti, rice, cereal, and tortillas.

## Vegetables (cooked under age 4)

Such as tomatoes, carrots, green beans, peas, squash, broccoli, sweet potatoes, cauliflower, spinach, and corn.

## Fruits

Such as oranges, apples, berries, melons, pears, peaches, bananas, apricots, grapefruit, pineapple, and grapes.

## Dairy

Such as milk, yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese, pudding, custard, ice cream, and frozen yogurt.

## Protein

Such as beef, pork, eggs, chicken, turkey, lamb, veal, fish, peanut butter, baked beans, pinto beans, and kidney beans.

## Did you know?

Fat is needed for young children to grow well. Children under the age of two should not be put on a low fat diet. Your child needs the energy provided by the fat in food or added fat like olive oil, canola oil, soybean oil, butter, and salad dressing.



## Snacks

Your child's stomach is small (about the size of her fist) and her energy needs are high. She can't get everything she needs in just three meals—she will also need a snack between meals and perhaps after dinner.



Choose snacks from food in the five food groups and serve with a beverage such as milk or water.

### Snack Ideas

- Cheese and crackers
- Peanut butter on toast
- Cereal (iron fortified) with milk
- Fruit and cheese
- Animal crackers and fruit

## Dessert

When you offer dessert, serve it along with the meal. Giving your child dessert at the end of a meal makes it seem like a reward and teaches him that dessert is more important than the other food.

### Dessert Ideas

- Yogurt
- Fruit
- Graham crackers
- Pudding
- Animal crackers
- Ice cream



# Milk, Juice and Other Drinks

Serve milk\* with meals so your child gets enough calcium and other important vitamins and minerals. Serve milk, water, or juice at snack time.

Children may get thirsty between meals and snacks—allow only water. Drinking too much juice may make your child feel full and he may not be hungry for meals. Pediatricians recommend children ages one to six drink no more than six ounces (6 oz.) of juice each day, including 100% juice.

## Sample Menu

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Breakfast | Cereal (iron-fortified) with milk<br>Juice   |
| Snack     | Peanut butter on toast<br>Milk   |
| Lunch     | Tuna sandwich<br>Peas<br>Peeled apple slices<br>Milk   |
| Snack     | Soft fruit with yogurt dip<br>Crackers<br>Water  |
| Dinner    | Chicken<br>Mashed potatoes<br>Cooked carrots<br>Roll with butter or margarine<br>Milk<br>Brownie |
| Snack     | Graham crackers<br>Milk  |



\*The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends breast milk or formula until age one. For children one to two years of age, the AAP recommends whole milk unless there are certain health circumstances. When your child turns one, ask the health care provider if lower fat milk is right for your child.

If your child doesn't like regular milk, try flavored milk. Flavored milk has the same amount of vitamins and minerals as white milk and just a few more calories. The additional calories are not a problem for active children.



## Encourage Variety

Vary the food you offer your child from each food group. For example, offer different kinds of fruit during the week.

Let her try all kinds of food—even those you don't like! She needs to decide for herself what food she likes or dislikes.

### Did you know?

Eating is an adventure. Be sure to eat with your child and have family meals as often as possible. Be a good role model. You can't expect your child to eat a variety of food if you don't!





## Did you know?

Pressuring, bribing, playing games or forcing your child to eat does not make your child eat more. In fact, it usually makes them eat less.

## How Much is a Serving?

Here are some ideas to help you decide how much of each food to offer your child:

Offer one-fourth to one-half of an adult serving size. (For example,  $\frac{1}{4}$  or  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a sandwich.) **OR** Offer one tablespoon of each food for each year of your child's age. (For example, you would offer a two-year-old two tablespoons of applesauce as a part of the meal.)

Start with these amounts and give her more if she's still hungry. Your child may eat more or less. Don't worry—trust your child's appetite.

If you would like more information on serving sizes, please see the inside back cover of this booklet.



# When Should My Child Eat?

Toddlers and preschoolers eat better when they are given meals and snacks at about the same times each day. Schedule meals and snacks two to three hours apart and allow your child to eat only at these times.

For example:

Breakfast	7:00 a.m.
Snack	10:00 a.m.
Lunch	12:30 p.m.
Snack	3:00 p.m.
Dinner	6:00 p.m.
Snack	before bedtime

Work out a meal and snack schedule that fits your daily routine so you and your child can eat together as much as possible.

Offer only water between meals and snacks.

Keeping the meal and snack schedule regular can be one of the toughest parent jobs, but it helps your child eat better.





## Where Should My Child Eat?

### **Serve Meals and Snacks at the Table**

There is no reason for a toddler or preschooler to carry food or drinks around the house. Insist that food be eaten at the table or another spot that you have agreed on. This will keep your child from thinking that eating and other activities, like watching TV, go together.

### **Make Mealtimes Relaxing and Enjoyable**

The mood in which food is served is also important. After the meal is ready, sit back and enjoy. Let your child eat at his own pace and in his own way. Turn off the TV. Talk about something besides food and eating– like what you did that day.

## More About Building Good Eating Habits

### Offering New Food

Many children are afraid of new things—including new food. The best way to offer a new food is to put a small amount on your child's plate and let him try it on his own. If you pressure him to eat or reward him for trying a new food, it will take longer for him to learn to like it. Be patient— it may take 10 to 15 times of seeing and touching a new food before he will taste it or eat it.

Your child learns about new food by tasting. Your child may taste a food by putting it in his mouth but may not swallow it. Encourage your child to taste food by giving him permission to politely spit it into a napkin if he doesn't like it. If your child doesn't enjoy a food, offer the food again in a few days.

Eating will be much more pleasant and relaxing if you handle new food this way.



## Eating Made Easy

Serve food in ways that are easy for your child to eat:

- Cut food into bite-size pieces\*, cut meat finely (see Safety section).
- Include soft food that is easy to chew and swallow.
- Substitute ground beef for steaks or chops.
- Try finger food such as salad, cheese cubes or peas (see Safety section).
- Make soups thin enough to drink or thick enough to stay on a spoon.
- Make food attractive and colorful.
- Provide a child-size spoon and a small fork with dull prongs.
- Provide unbreakable dishes.
- Use a plate or bowl with raised sides.
- Seat the child in a chair that is high enough so her elbows can rest comfortably on the table and make sure her feet are supported.
- Encourage your child to feed herself. This will help her become self-confident. She will probably use her fingers most or some of the time, but she will get better at using silverware with practice.

Adapted from *How to Get Your Kid to Eat...But Not Too Much* by Ellyn Satter.

\* ¼- to ½-inch pieces

# Dealing with Challenging Eating Behaviors

Children need to learn how to behave at the table. Set rules that both you and your child can live with.

Here are some suggestions:

- Learning to eat can get a little messy. However, deliberate messiness like throwing food or dumping it on the floor should not be allowed. This is a sign that your child is probably not hungry and should be excused from the table.
- Stick to your schedule of meals and snacks. It will only be two to three hours before you offer food again. If you are firm, your child will learn not to beg for food. He will also be more likely to eat at meals and snacks because he knows he will have to wait to eat again.



## Did you know?

You shouldn't be a short-order cook for your child. You can avoid complaints by making sure meals include at least one food she likes, then let her choose what she wants to eat from the food you have offered.





## Safety

- Before eating or touching food, have your child wash his hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. (You can time this by singing the ABC song.)
- Let hot food cool to avoid burning your child's mouth. Be especially careful to cool food that has been heated in the microwave. Stir the food and check the temperature before serving.
- Have your child sit down while eating and sit with him. He needs to be supervised and will enjoy your company.

### To Avoid Choking:

- Don't give nuts, hard candy, popcorn or raw vegetables to children under age four. Many children this age can't chew well and are more likely to choke on these foods.
- Don't allow your child to run or play with food in his mouth. Don't allow others to distract your child while eating. This is when many children choke.
- Cut hotdogs lengthwise into quarters, cut grapes and meatballs in half and cook vegetables until tender. Young children are more likely to choke on small, round, hard foods with slippery surfaces.
- Learn the Heimlich Maneuver in case you need to help someone who is choking. This is a basic first aid procedure for treatment of choking that you can learn from the Red Cross or the American Heart Association.

Well, there it is: the What, When and Where of feeding your toddler or preschooler. Caring for a child this age can be a challenge. We hope these suggestions will make your life a little easier so you can enjoy and appreciate your amazing and independent child!

For more information, we encourage you to refer to these resources:

Books:

- *Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense* by Ellyn Satter. Bull Publishing Co., 2000.
- *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family* by Ellyn Satter. Kelcy Press, 2008.
- *How to Get Your Kid to Eat...But Not Too Much* by Ellyn Satter. Bull Publishing Co., 1987.

Web sites:

- [www.ellynsatter.com](http://www.ellynsatter.com)
- [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)
- [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)
- [www.mealsmatter.org](http://www.mealsmatter.org)
- [www.gerber.com/feedingplan](http://www.gerber.com/feedingplan)

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# Feeding Your 2 to 5 Year Old

## Building Good Eating Habits

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# SERVING GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN 2 TO 5 YEARS OLD

These guidelines will help you decide which foods and how much to offer from the five food groups. You may need to add more servings to meet your child's calorie needs, especially during times of rapid growth. Ask a health care professional how much is right for your child.



Some children between ages two and three may have smaller appetites. Offer smaller serving sizes, but increase the number of servings offered during the day.

Food Group	Example Foods	Daily Servings (1,000-1,600 calories)	Suggested Serving Size
<b>Grains</b> 	ready-to-eat cereal cereal, cooked noodles spaghetti roll bagel bread rice muffins crackers	<b>6-10</b>	1 serving = ½ slice bread ¼ bagel ¼ cup cooked cereal ¼ cup ready to eat cereal ¼ cup, noodles, spaghetti or rice 2 two-inch square crackers
<b>Vegetables</b> 	<b>Vitamin A Sources</b> carrots sweet potato spinach squash greens broccoli <b>Vitamin C Sources</b> tomato potato green pepper cabbage green peas	<b>2-4</b>	1 serving = ¼ cup cooked ½ cup raw leafy ½ cup juice
<b>Fruits</b> 	<b>Vitamin A Sources</b> cantaloupe peaches apricots <b>Vitamin C Sources</b> oranges grapefruit strawberries cantaloupe	<b>3-4</b>	1 serving = ¼ cup canned or in jars ½ small, raw ½ cup juice
<b>Dairy</b> 	milk cottage cheese frozen yogurt cheese yogurt ice cream	<b>3-5*</b>	1 serving = ½ cup milk 1 one-inch square cheese cube 1 slice processed cheese ½ cup yogurt
<b>Protein</b> 	beef chicken, turkey peanut butter beans (cooked) pork fish egg dried peas	<b>2-5</b>	1 serving = 1-1½ oz. lean meat, fish or poultry ½-1 egg ¼ cup cooked, dry beans/peas 2 Tbsp. peanut butter
<b>Oils</b> 	olive oil corn oil soybean oil canola oil butter margarine salad dressing		Fat is needed for young children to grow well. Children under the age of two should not be on low fat diets like some adults. Your child needs the energy provided by the fat in food or added fat like butter, margarine and oils.

Offer at least one serving of an iron-fortified food from this group every day

Offer your child a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables. Choose ones that are orange, green, red, purple, and white.

Sweets: Foods such as cake, pie, donuts, candy, sugar, pop, and most fruit flavored drinks provide mainly calories and are not a good source of vitamins and minerals.

\*Children aged 1-3 years need at least 3 servings, children aged 4-5 years need at least 5 servings. Whole milk for children 1-2 years old. After age 2, ask your healthcare provider about low fat or fat-free milk.