



Eat Right Be Active

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A guide for parents
and caregivers of toddlers
12-36 months



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Introduction

We all want the best for our children. We want them to grow up healthy and feeling good about themselves.

This booklet can help. It has lots of everyday ideas for you, as the busy parent or caregiver of a toddler. Putting these ideas into action will help your child eat right and become active for life. Just remember, if you eat right and are active, your toddler will follow your lead!

Note: In this booklet, “toddler” refers to children 12 - 36 months old. Both “him” and “her” are used throughout to describe your toddler. “Parent” refers to parents, other adult family members, caregivers or anyone else involved in your child’s day-to-day care. “Health care provider” refers to doctors, registered dietitians, nurses or other regulated health care providers.

Is my child growing well?

Children grow and develop at different rates. Your toddler may be taller, shorter, lighter or heavier than other toddlers the same age.

What’s most important is her overall growth pattern, not her height or weight at any one time. Ask about her growth pattern when you are visiting your health care provider.

GOOD TO KNOW:

Growth depends on many factors

- *Family - parents’ size and shape, cultural background*
- *Age - children grow fastest as babies and teenagers*
- *General health - medical conditions, illnesses, medications*
- *Gender - boys and girls have different growth patterns*
- *Eating habits - what and how much your child eats*
- *Activity level - how active your child is, and for how long*

Adapted from: *ABCs of Feeding Preschoolers*. Sudbury & District Health Unit, 2004.

Eat right, be active quiz

What is considered “normal” eating and activity for a toddler may surprise you. Answer the following questions with a **Yes** or **No**.

1. Are mealtimes with toddlers usually messy? Yes ☐ No ☐

As your toddler learns to feed herself, mealtimes will be messy. Some food will make it into her mouth but some may also be on the floor, her face and hands. She learns best how to eat by watching you, so eat together often. Let her do most of it herself and don't get upset by the mess.

2. Does playing with my toddler count as physical activity? Yes ☐ No ☐

Playing with your toddler is an important and fun way to get her active. One of the best ways to involve your child in active play is to go outside where she can make up her own games that involve running, jumping, exploring and climbing. Indoors, use music to inspire her to move. The key is to move more and avoid long periods of being still.

3. My toddler seems less interested in eating since he turned one. Is this normal? Yes ☐ No ☐

It is normal for a toddler's appetite to go up and down. Trust him to know when he is hungry or full. If you try to make him eat more, he will likely eat less. Serve him a variety of healthy foods. Offer less than you think he will eat and let him ask for more.

4. Is physical activity important in the first years of life for healthy growth and development? Yes ☐ No ☐

Being physically active every day is very important for your toddler. The basic skills he learns now will make it easier to master more difficult skills later. His posture, confidence, flexibility and bone strength will also improve.

5. Should I serve my 12-month-old toddler homogenized (3.25% M.F.) milk? Yes ☐ No ☐

Until she is 24 months old, your toddler needs breastmilk or at least 500 mL (2 cups) of homo (3.25% M.F.) milk each day. Before 24 months, do not offer skim, 1% or 2% milk or fortified soy beverages. Rice, potato and almond beverages, even fortified ones, are not substitutes for milk or fortified soy beverages. Vegan toddlers should be offered soy-based infant formulas up to 24 months. Talk to your health care provider about the need for a vitamin D supplement.

Quiz answers: All Yes

Note: If your toddler does not seem healthy and energetic, or if you have other concerns, talk to your health care provider.

Eat right: The basics

How you feed your toddler is just as important as *what* you feed her. The following ideas can help ensure healthy growth.

How to help your toddler eat well

- **Eat the same meal together.** Make mealtime a pleasant family time. Your good example will teach her how to enjoy healthy foods and how to use utensils.
- **Offer her a variety of healthy foods** with at least one food you know she will eat. Let her decide what and how much to eat—if anything at all. She knows best when she is hungry or full. Don't pressure her to eat more or less by saying things like, "Just take one more bite" or "I think you've had enough to eat."
- **Stick to a routine.** Serve her three meals and two or three snacks every day. Offer them at about the same times each day, two or three hours apart, with only water in between – this way she will be hungry at mealtimes.
- **Make it easy for her to learn to eat.** Provide utensils with short, broad, solid handles and forks with blunt ends. If possible, use unbreakable, shallow bowls or plates with a lip. These make it easier for her to pick up small pieces of food.
- **Serve some foods she can eat with her hands.** While she is learning to use utensils, she will still want to use her fingers. Cut-up pieces of food on the high chair tray are okay as well.
- **Serve foods separately.** It can take time to start liking mixed dishes such as stews or congee.
- **Have her sit down comfortably.** Make sure she is safely secured in a booster seat or high chair.
- **Turn off the TV and put away toys.** This will help her to focus on eating without distractions.
- **Let her eat slowly.** If she has not eaten much after 20-30 minutes, take away the food without comment. Let her leave the table when she is finished eating.

GOOD TO KNOW:

How much to eat?

Sometimes toddlers are not very hungry or not hungry at all. This is normal. Your job is to decide what, when and where to offer food. Your child's job is to decide if she wants to eat and how much she wants to eat.

What to serve your toddler every day

- Meals that include foods from at least three food groups: Vegetables and Fruit, Grain Products, Milk and Alternatives, Meat and Alternatives.
- Snacks that include foods from at least two food groups.
- Meals and snacks that look appealing – with a variety of colours, tastes and textures such as smooth, soft, diced and grated.
- A variety of vegetables and fruit. Include dark green ones such as bok choy, peas, peppers and broccoli, and orange ones such as pumpkin, carrots, cantaloupe, sweet potato, squash, apricots and peaches.
- Foods in their natural form (such as baked chicken thigh or plain oatmeal) instead of processed foods (such as hot dogs, bologna, chicken nuggets or sweetened cereals). Processed foods tend to be higher in sodium and lower in fibre.
- Whole grains. Try oatmeal, barley, cream of wheat, quinoa, brown rice, whole grain cereals, breads, crackers and pastas.
- 500 mL (2 cups) of milk over the course of a day. Find out more on page 5.
- Meat alternatives or lean meats. Try: beans, tofu, lentils, chickpeas, hummus, eggs, lean meats trimmed of fat, fish* (fresh, canned or frozen) and chicken with the skin removed.
- Iron-rich foods: red meats, poultry (the dark meat has more iron than white meat), beans, lentils, fish*, tofu, dried fruits, enriched breads and cereals.
- Foods high in vitamin C help the body use iron. Most vegetables and fruit provide vitamin C.
- Foods prepared with little or no added sugar and salt.
- Some nutritious higher-fat foods: meats, cheese and peanut butter.

*For tips on how to choose fish wisely, see page 11.

GOOD TO KNOW:

Small tummies fill up fast. Make every bite count!

Your toddler needs over 50 nutrients for good health. Offering him a wide variety of healthy foods and drinks will help him to get all the nutrition he needs. Special toddler foods are not necessary. Serve him cut-up pieces of the same healthy foods the rest of your family eats.

Fruit drinks, punches and cocktails, chocolate, store-bought cookies and French fries leave less room for the healthy food your toddler needs.

Drinks matter

Both the foods and the drinks you offer your toddler are important in helping her to grow up healthy. Find out what drinks to serve, how much and when.

What drinks should I offer?

- **Breastmilk.** You can combine breastfeeding with feeding expressed breastmilk. Talk to your health care provider about the need for a vitamin D supplement.
- **Tap water.** Offer cold tap water during the day and more often when the weather is hot or your child is very active. Bottled water is not necessary unless tap water is unsafe.
- **Milk and fortified soy beverages.** From 12 - 24 months, serve homo (3.25% M.F.) milk. Do not serve skim milk, 1%, 2% or fortified soy beverage before 24 months. Vegan infants who are not breastfed should use commercial soy-based infant formulas. After 24 months, switch your toddler to the milk or fortified soy beverage the rest of the family drinks. Rice, potato and almond beverages - even fortified ones - are not substitutes for milk or fortified soy beverages.

Offer 500 mL (2 cups) of milk over the course of a day but don't provide more than 750 mL (3 cups). If your toddler fills up on milk, he won't be hungry for other healthy foods he needs. Try offering 125 mL (½ cup) of milk at every meal and one snack time. Talk to your health care provider if your toddler does not drink at least 500 mL (2 cups) of milk or fortified soy beverage a day.

- **Juice.** Too much juice leaves less room for healthy food choices. It can also cause tooth decay. Limit 100% juice to 125 - 175 mL (4 - 6 oz) per day. Offer vegetables and fruit more often than juice.
- **Avoid sweetened beverages.** Toddlers do not need sugary fruit punches, drinks, beverages, cocktails or soft drinks. These take the place of healthier foods, may cause tooth decay and do not help children grow well.

GOOD TO KNOW:

When should drinks be offered?

Breastfeed or serve milk or juice in cups only at meal and snack times. Offer water between meals and snacks – it won't spoil your toddler's appetite and it is better for his teeth.

How much food does my toddler need?

Food guide for toddlers 12 - 24 months

Offer your toddler a variety of foods from each food group in Canada's Food Guide every day. For toddlers under 24 months old, there is no recommended number of servings for each food group. However, you can use the following chart as a guide on how much to offer. Let your toddler decide how much of it to eat.

Food group	Suggested serving sizes
Vegetables and Fruit	
Offer at least one dark green vegetable (such as bok choy, green beans, broccoli) and one orange vegetable (such as carrots, sweet potato, squash) or certain orange fruits (such as cantaloupe, apricots, peaches) each day.	$\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ medium vegetable or fruit 15 - 60 mL (1 - 4 tbsp) cooked vegetables or fruit, or grated or chopped raw vegetables or fruit 30 - 60 mL (2 tbsp - $\frac{1}{4}$ cup or 1 - 2 oz) 100% juice
Grain Products	
Offer whole grain products each day.	$\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ slice bread $\frac{1}{8}$ - $\frac{1}{4}$ bagel, pita or tortilla 5 - 15 g cold cereal 30 - 100 mL (2 tbsp - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) cooked cereal 15 - 60 mL (1 - 4 tbsp) cooked pasta, rice, bulgur or couscous
Milk and Alternatives	
Offer 500 mL (2 cups or 16 oz) of milk each day.	60 - 125 mL ($\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup or 2 - 4 oz) homo (3.25% M.F.) milk 15 - 25 g ($\frac{1}{2}$ - 1 oz) cheese 30 - 100 g (2 tbsp - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) yogurt
Meat and Alternatives	
Offer beans, lentils and tofu often. Offer fish at least two times a week. For tips on how to choose fish wisely, see page 11.	10 - 35 g (1 - 4 tbsp or $\frac{1}{4}$ - $1\frac{1}{4}$ oz) cooked fish, poultry or lean meat 15 - 100 mL (1 tbsp - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) tofu or cooked beans or lentils $\frac{1}{4}$ - 1 egg 5 - 15 mL (1 tsp - 1 tbsp) peanut butter or other nut butters

Source: Feeding Your Toddler, Nutrition Services, York Region Community and Health Services Department, 2007.

GOOD TO KNOW:

Have a nutrition question?

For advice you can trust, speak to a registered dietitian about healthy eating. Call the EatRight Ontario toll-free information service at 1-877-510-510-2 or visit www.ontario.ca/eatright.

Food guide for toddlers 24 - 36 months

For children 24 months and older, Canada's Food Guide gives recommendations on the number of servings for each food group. Food Guide Servings can be divided into smaller amounts of food offered at different meal and snack times. You can get a copy of Canada's Food Guide from www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide or by contacting your local public health unit.

Number of daily servings	How much is one Food Guide Serving?
Vegetables and Fruit	
4 Food Guide Servings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 medium vegetable or fruit • 125 mL (½ cup) fresh, frozen or canned vegetables or tomato sauce, fruit, or 100% juice • 250 mL (1 cup) leafy raw vegetables
Grain Products	
3 Food Guide Servings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 slice of bread • ½ bagel • ½ pita or ½ large tortilla • 125 mL (½ cup) cooked rice, bulgur, quinoa, pasta or couscous • 175 g (¾ cup) hot cereal • 30 g cold cereal
Milk and Alternatives	
2 Food Guide Servings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breastmilk* • 250 mL (1 cup) milk or fortified soy beverage • 175 g (¾ cup) yogurt • 50 g (1½ oz) hard cheese
Meat and Alternatives	
1 Food Guide Serving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 eggs • 30 mL (2 tbsp) peanut butter or other nut butters • 125 mL (½ cup) or 75 g (2½ oz) cooked fish**, shellfish, poultry or lean meat • 175 mL (¾ cup) cooked and canned beans, lentils, chickpeas, hummus or tofu

Adapted from: Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide, Health Canada, 2007.

* For more information on breastfeeding, see page 5.

**For tips on choosing fish wisely, see page 11.

Sample menu plans

These menus give some examples of how to put together nutritionally balanced meals and snacks for your toddler. Use the ideas you like when planning your own menu. Find healthy recipes and meal planning advice at www.ontario.ca/eatright.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Breakfast	Oatmeal Canned peaches Milk	Toasted English muffin spread thinly with peanut butter Grapes cut in quarters Milk	Scrambled egg Whole grain toast with margarine Milk
Morning snack	Whole wheat toast with non-hydrogenated margarine Hard cooked egg Water	Graham crackers Fruit flavoured yogurt with banana slices Water	Whole grain bread stick Strawberries Water
Lunch	Cheese cubes Bread with margarine Green peas Applesauce Milk	Baked beans Perogies Cooked rapini Margarine Cantaloupe Milk	Homemade macaroni and cheese Leftover chicken Cooked okra Milk
Afternoon snack	Steamed bun Fruit cocktail Water	Matzo cracker Plum slices Milk	O-shaped oat cereal Pear slices Water
Dinner	Chicken Couscous Cooked broccoli Margarine Seasonal fruit salad Milk	Baked salmon* Brown rice Sweet potato Margarine Milk	Lentils or dhal Rice Cooked carrots and green beans Margarine Bran muffin Milk
Evening snack	Milk Dry whole grain cereal	Milk Tangerine	Milk Cantaloupe

Adapted from Feeding Your Toddler, Nutrition Services, York Region Community and Health Services Department, 2007.

* For tips on choosing fish wisely, see page 11.

Get the best nutrition for your money

- Buy fresh vegetables and fruit in season. At other times, buy frozen or canned.
- Carrots, cabbage, onions, sweet potato, rutabaga, pre-bagged apples and oranges are usually good buys all year.
- Buy meat on sale and freeze any extra.
- In place of meat, substitute beans, lentils, canned fish*, tofu or eggs.
- Look for store brands in larger packages and compare them with bulk store prices. You can often buy items at a lower price from a bulk food store in the amounts you need.
- Buy less-processed foods. For example, instead of buying a small box of flavoured rice, choose a large bag of plain rice and flavour it yourself. Choose unsweetened cereals over sweetened cereals. Flavour your own oatmeal with cinnamon or vanilla.
- Limit how often you buy foods that offer little nutrition for your food dollar, such as cookies and donuts, cheesies and chips, candies and chocolate, fruit punches and drinks, pop and soft drinks.

* For tips on choosing fish wisely, see page 11.

Label reading made easy

Eating right is easier if you have healthy choices on hand. When you buy packaged foods, compare the Nutrition Facts on each label.

Step 1. Check the serving sizes on each brand to see if you are comparing similar amounts.

Step 2. Choose the brand with more vitamins, minerals and fibre.

Step 3. Choose the brand with fewer calories and less sodium, saturated fat and trans fat.

Find out more:

- Take a virtual grocery store tour at: www.healthyeatingisinstore.ca.
- Visit Health Canada at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca. Select “Food and Nutrition” then select “Nutrition Labelling”.

Nutrition Facts Valeur nutritive	
Serving size 3 pieces (20 g) Portion 3 morceaux (20 g)	
Amount	%Daily Value
Teneur	%Valeur quotidienne
Calories / Calories	80
Total Fat / Lipides	0.5 g 1 %
Saturated / saturés	0 g 0 %
+Trans / trans	0 g
Cholesterol / Cholestérol	0 mg
Sodium / Sodium	290 mg 11 %
Total Carbohydrate / Glucides	15 g 5 %
Fibre / Fibre	1 g 4 %
Sugars / Sucres	1 g
Protein / Protéines	2 g
Vitamin A / Vitamine A	0 %
Vitamin C / Vitamine C	0 %
Calcium / Calcium	0 %
Iron / Fer	8 %

Top feeding challenges

1

Challenge: My son wants to eat the same food all the time.

Solution: This is normal and will pass. Keep offering other healthy choices from each of the four food groups. As long as his favourite food is from one of the four food groups, let him have it.

2

Challenge: My child refuses to eat meat.

Solution: Prepare meats so they are easier to chew and swallow. Try ground meats or cut meat into small pieces and serve it in soups, stews and sauces. Serve other protein-rich foods such as eggs, fish, soy foods, beans and lentils. If your child will not eat any meat or meat alternatives, talk to your health care provider.

3

Challenge: My son doesn't like vegetables.

Solution: Be patient and keep serving a variety of vegetables in new and different ways even if he keeps refusing them. Serve new vegetables alongside familiar foods. He will be more likely to eat vegetables if he sees you eating them too. Let him help you grow, shop for, wash and cook vegetables. Don't coax or pressure him to eat them. Try:

- Soft-cooked veggies with yogurt, tzatziki, hummus dip or cheese sauce.
- Vegetables pureed into soups, sauces and stews.
- Continue to serve fruit. Many of the nutrients in vegetables are also found in fruit.

4

Challenge: My caregiver coaxes my daughter to finish all her food.

Solution: Explain that coaxing children to eat can eventually lead to food refusal or overeating. Ask the caregiver to eat and enjoy the meal with your daughter but not to pressure her to eat certain types or amounts of food. Also explain how your daughter usually shows when she is finished eating – perhaps saying “no” or “all done”.

5

Challenge: I'm having a hard time getting my daughter off the bottle.

Solution: Try replacing the mid-day bottle with a cup. Once she is used to this, take another bottle away. Keep doing this until she is ready to give up the last bottle. Try a colourful or special cup. If you offer an evening bottle, give it early so she is still awake to brush her teeth before sleeping. Bottles are soothing and can be hard to give up. Lots of extra cuddles will help her adjust to this change.

NOTE: If you still have concerns, talk to your health care provider or call an EatRight Ontario dietitian at 1-877-510-510-2.

Fun food adventures

Help your toddler become more familiar with new foods.

- Visit a farm. Try a pick-your-own or other farm open to the public.
- Cook together. She can scrub or mash vegetables or help with stirring.
- Shop together. Show and talk about what you are buying.
- Visit the library. Find books about food, farms, gardening and cooking.
- Pretend. Act out farming, shopping, cooking and eating.

GOOD TO KNOW:

Fabulous Fish

Many fish and shellfish are healthy and safe for the entire family. They are high in protein and are a good source of vitamins A and D. The healthy fats in fish also help in normal brain and eye development.

Serve toddlers 12 - 24 months of age fish or shellfish at least twice a week (one serving = 10 - 35 g (1 - 4 tbsp or $\frac{1}{4}$ - $1\frac{1}{4}$ oz)). For those over two years old, serve at least two Food Guide Servings (one serving = 125 mL or 75 g ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup or $2\frac{1}{2}$ oz)) of fish or shellfish each week. Choose fish and shellfish that are low in mercury, such as cod, haddock, rainbow trout, tilapia, sardines, salmon (including canned salmon), canned "light" tuna (choose skipjack, yellowfin or tongol), pollock (Boston bluefish) and shrimp. Mercury is harmful to the developing brain in the unborn and children of all ages.

Find out more:

- *Speak with a registered dietitian about choosing fish wisely. Call EatRight Ontario at: 1-877-510-510-2.*
- *Contact your local public health unit.*

Be careful with foods that can cause choking

Choking can happen with any food, but certain types of food are especially unsafe. Always watch your toddler as she eats.

Ten tips for preparing food

1. Younger toddlers, from about 12 - 24 months, need food cut into pieces large enough that they can pick up but small enough to be safe. Cut food into $\frac{1}{2}$ - 1 cm ($\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ inch) pieces.
2. Remove pits and seeds from fruit and cut into bite-size pieces.
3. Cut grapes and cherry tomatoes into quarters. Cut hard raw vegetables such as carrots into narrow strips or grate them.
4. Spread peanut butter thinly. Never serve it from a spoon.
5. Cut hot dogs and sausages into long strips and then into bite-size pieces. (Note: Serve plain meats such as chicken legs and avoid the less healthy processed meats such as hot dogs, sausages, luncheon meats or deli meats.)
6. Remove small bones from fish fillets. Mash up the soft, calcium-rich bones in canned salmon before serving.
7. Make meats easier to chew by stewing, boiling or slow cooking until tender. Dicing and serving meat in stews and sauces or with dips helps, too.
8. Serve beans and chickpeas mashed or finely chopped. These can also be pureed into soups or dips.
9. Avoid hard, round foods such as raisins, candies, olives and nuts.
10. Do not use toothpicks or skewers.

Tips for eating

- Have her sit down securely in a high chair or booster seat when eating. Discourage talking or laughing when food is in her mouth. Slow her down if she is eating too much, too quickly.
- Don't let your toddler eat in the car while you drive. You can't pay enough attention to her while she is eating. Plus, a sudden stop could make her choke.

GOOD TO KNOW:

Sometimes when children chew and swallow food, some of the food gets too far back on the tongue and causes a gag reflex. This gag reflex protects them from choking. If your child gags regularly, talk to his health care provider.

Food allergies

A food allergy is a reaction to the protein in a food. If your toddler has a food allergy, the only way to prevent the reaction is to avoid the allergy-causing food.

Know the signs of an allergic reaction

Stop feeding a food if you think it is causing:

- Swelling of the face, tongue, lips, eyes, throat.
- Rash, itchiness, hives that are spreading.
- Vomiting, stomach cramps, diarrhea.
- Problems with breathing, swallowing, wheezing, coughing, choking, voice changes.
- Sneezing, runny nose, blocked nose.
- Itchy, watery eyes.

NOTE: Call 911 if your toddler has trouble breathing or passes out.

If you think your toddler may have a food allergy, talk to your health care provider about allergy tests. If a change in diet is needed, a registered dietitian can help you plan meals and snacks.

Find out more:

- Anaphylaxis Canada: www.anaphylaxis.org
- Allergy/Asthma Information Association: www.aaia.ca

GOOD TO KNOW:

Tips for healthy teeth and gums

- *Avoid bottles at bedtime. Some of the liquid stays in the mouth and can cause tooth decay. If you are offering a bottle, fill it with water only.*
- *Begin dental visits around 12 months of age.*
- *Clean his teeth with a small, soft-bristled toothbrush for two minutes at least twice a day. Bedtime is the most important time to brush to prevent cavities. Toothpaste is not needed for children under 36 months of age unless they are at a high risk for getting cavities. In this case, use only a pea-sized amount of toothpaste and teach your child not to swallow the toothpaste.*

For more tips, see Drinks matter on page 5.

Be active: The basics

Your toddler loves to crawl, walk, climb, jump and run. Her love of being active will help her grow and stay healthy throughout her life. That's why it is so important for you to make being active a regular part of everyone's day and keep it fun.

Being good at physical activity and sports will not necessarily come naturally as your toddler grows. She needs you to teach her the building blocks of physical activity such as running, kicking, jumping and throwing.

You are her best teacher and role model. Make time for lots of practice. This will make it easier for her to gain confidence in her ability to perform an activity and then to learn more complex movement skills as she grows. Be active together indoors and outdoors with balls, bean bags and playground equipment.

Daily activity needs of toddlers

There are no official Canadian recommendations for how much daily activity your toddler should get, but guidelines from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) in the United States suggest that toddlers should:

1. Participate in both structured activities (such as swimming lessons) and unstructured activities (such as unplanned play led by your child). These will help develop physical activity skills and will improve endurance, strength, flexibility and balance.
2. Have many chances to be active during the day with rest time in between. Toddlers should not sit still for long periods of time. If very young children often spend several inactive hours at a time in strollers, play pens and infant seats, they may be slower to roll over, crawl and walk.
3. Learn basic movement skills that are building blocks for more complex movements. For example, if you want to teach your toddler to throw a ball, you might start by having her roll a ball along the ground to you. Rolling the ball back to her will help her to learn how to catch it.
4. Have indoor and outdoor play areas that are safe and that allow toddlers to move around.
5. Have opportunities for active play, whether at home, at daycare or at preschool.

Why active play is important

Daily physical activity is important for your toddler's growth, development and overall health.

Active play:

- Increases energy and improves stamina.
- Helps develop strong bones and muscles.
- Develops good posture and balance.
- Makes the heart and lungs stronger.
- Increases flexibility and improves coordination.
- Promotes healthy eating.
- Helps improve sleeping habits.
- Reduces worry and helps children deal with stress.
- Helps children feel good about themselves by building self-esteem and confidence.
- Helps improve concentration, memory, creativity and problem-solving.
- Provides a chance to socialize and make friends.
- Develops sport skills and positive lifelong attitudes toward physical activity.

Best of all, physical activity helps to make your toddler feel great. If you can be active together, that is even better. It is a great way to encourage family fun.

GOOD TO KNOW:

Make active time for YOU

Toddlers can be demanding - leaving you feeling stressed and tired. So be good to yourself by making time to be active. Thirty minutes of moderate, daily physical activity lowers stress, increases your energy, and helps you sleep better ... just to name a few of the benefits. But fitting physical activity into your daily routine isn't easy. Check out some of the ideas below to help you plan.

- ☐ *Join a walking or running group or start one in your neighbourhood.*
- ☐ *Book a regular meeting time with a fitness friend. Split the time in half. Both of you take turns caring for the children while the other person exercises.*
- ☐ *Rent or borrow a physical activity DVD to try during nap times or while your child is playing nearby.*
- ☐ *Try a new class once a week at your local community centre. Some programs even include daycare.*
- ☐ *Keep running shoes in your car. If you are waiting for an appointment and you find it will be delayed, go out for a walk while you are waiting.*

Activity checklist for toddlers

Toddlers develop at different rates, but this basic checklist can give you some sense of how well your 24 month old is developing. By 24 months, your toddler should be:

- ☐ Rolling, crawling, walking, jumping, running and climbing.
- ☐ Pushing boxes and pulling toys.
- ☐ Getting into a sturdy chair by himself.
- ☐ Walking up and down stairs with one foot on each step while holding a hand rail (with close supervision!).
- ☐ Bending over easily without falling, and picking up toys from a standing position.
- ☐ Standing on one foot with help.
- ☐ Walking on tiptoes.
- ☐ Kicking a small ball forward, and tossing or dropping it into a bin.
- ☐ Catching a rolled ball by trapping it with her arms, hands and body.
- ☐ Trying to catch a ball by holding her arms directly in front of her body (she may or may not succeed.)

NOTE: Watch your toddler carefully during these activities. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about your child's development.

Source: Adapted from Nipissing District Developmental Screen Inc. (2002). *Nipissing District Developmental Screen* is available from www.ndds.ca/ontario/home.html.

Skill building is vital

Being an active toddler should be all about having fun while building skills. Developing basic skills now, such as running and kicking, will help your toddler master more complex skills later, such as kicking a soccer ball towards a net. Try some of the following activities with your child. Just remember to keep it fun and give her lots of praise and practice.

Activities for children beginning at around 12 months:

- Crawling up and down stairs and steps (with close supervision!).
- Walking sideways holding furniture.
- Picking up toys from the floor and pushing or pulling them.
- Tossing or rolling a large ball – use different sizes and textures.
- Playing tag by crawling on the floor or by using furniture for balance.
- Stacking building blocks.
- Making a playhouse from a large box and then climbing in and out.

Activities for children beginning at around 24 months:

- Walking or running, then changing direction.
- Throwing and catching a large ball.
- Kicking a large ball.
- Water play and swimming with an adult.
- Singing a song with actions like jumping up and down.
- Riding a tricycle (with a helmet).
- Sorting objects into piles by shape, touch, colour and size.
- Pretending to be different animals (e.g., hopping like a frog, pouncing like a cat, taking big steps like an elephant.)

NOTE: Toddlers have short attention spans. That's why they should be allowed to come and go with all activities.

How to get your toddler moving

You can encourage play, teach basic skills and act as a role model for lifelong physical activity. This doesn't mean you have to be a great athlete or an expert at any one activity. It's all about the joy of playing.

- Go outside. Children tend to be more active away from TVs and computers. Being outdoors also gives them more space to use their large muscle groups – with movements such as jumping, running, climbing and leaping.
- Join a parent and tot physical activity program. Many are run through local parks and recreation departments.
- Go for a walk together. If you are pushing your child in a stroller or pulling a wagon, encourage him to get out and help push or pull for short distances.
- Going on a road trip? Take active play breaks along the way.
- Teach your child the games you played as a child. Try “Ring Around the Rosie,” “London Bridge” and “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”
- Buy balls of different shapes, sizes and textures. Start by rolling one back and forth with your toddler. Eventually try throwing it. Large, soft balls work best.
- Rent a children's fitness video from the library and try it out together.
- Find a place in your home where it is safe for your toddler to throw a ball, run, climb and roll.
- Dance to your child's favourite music.
- Read your child a story and act it out. Many stories make being active easy.
- Have a marching parade indoors or outdoors using homemade instruments.
- Keep bins of equipment for indoor and outdoor play. Include items such as large, soft beach balls, buckets and shovels, stacking blocks and other household items that are safe for your child.
- Keep a few ‘active’ toys in your car in case you find yourself at a park, a beach or even just waiting for an appointment.
- As a family, try walking instead of taking the car.
- Jump in puddles, splash in a wading pool, make snow angels, jump in the fall leaves.

Top tips for physical activity

- 1 Boost the fun factor.** Being physically active should be an enjoyable and natural part of your child's day. Play non-competitive games such as kicking a large, soft ball back and forth without keeping score. Change the rules to suit his needs.
- 2 Provide the right stuff.** No matter whether your toddler is a girl or boy, provide all types of equipment—different kinds of balls, inflatable toys, stacking toys, digging equipment for the sandbox, cardboard boxes to crawl in and around.
- 3 Be a role model.** When your child sees you being active and enjoying it, she will try to copy that. Build physical activity into your daily routine. Walk to daycare and walk to do small errands with your child. Talk with her about what you do to be active yourself, whether it is a fitness class or taking a walk at lunch.
- 4 Mix it up.** Plan activities that fit your child's interests. Walking, playing, jumping and climbing are all fun and don't cost a thing. Mix in these three types of activities:
 - Endurance. Running, jumping and swimming strengthen the heart and lungs.
 - Flexibility. Gymnastics (often called "baby gym") and dance encourage bending, stretching and reaching.
 - Strength. Climbing strengthens muscles and bones.
- 5 Work with the weather.** Enjoy a walk in the rain and jump over the puddles. On a nice day, jump over marks or cracks in the sidewalk. In fall or winter, look for safe places to jump into piles of leaves or mounds of snow. On very cold or wet days, be active inside – play hide and seek, dance, build a fort, invent parachute games using bed sheets. Use your imagination. The sky's the limit!

GOOD TO KNOW:

Limit TV and computer time to under two hours per day.

If your toddler is under two years old, consider not having any screen time at all. It often takes the place of physically active play.

Ask other family members such as grandparents and caregivers to support the rules you set for physical activity and screen time.

Play it safe

Playing hard and having fun is important for your toddler. To keep it fun, it's important to remember that physical activity and safety go hand in hand. In addition to active supervision, consider the following:

Equipment. Replace damaged toys and equipment. Check that any protective gear your child wears fits properly.

Balls and bats. Choose balls that are large, soft and flexible. Use lightweight, plastic bats.

Helmets. Your child must wear a safety-approved helmet when riding a tricycle or scooter, skating, tobogganing or playing hockey. Find out more about safety-approved helmets by visiting the website below. Always remove helmets before playing on playground equipment.

Shoes. Buy well-fitting, comfortable shoes.

Sun safety. Protect your child from the sun with a wide-brimmed hat, long-sleeved, lightweight clothing, sunglasses and a sunscreen of at least 30 SPF. Whenever possible, try to play in a shaded area. Limit sun exposure between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or when the UV index is three or higher.

Winter safety. Prevent frostbite by dressing your toddler in warm, dry clothes. She should play indoors if the temperature falls below -25°C (-13°F). Keep your child away from ponds, lakes and rivers during the spring thaw.

Playground. Make sure all playground equipment and the ground around it is free of broken glass, sharp objects and debris. Choose playgrounds with impact absorbing ground cover such as sand, wood chips or shredded rubber. On pre-school equipment the fill should be at least 15 cm (6 inches) deep. Grass, dirt, asphalt and concrete are not safe surfaces for playground equipment. Children under five should not play on playground equipment over five feet tall. Remove anything from your child's clothing that could strangle her, such as the draw-strings on her jacket and choose neck warmers instead of scarves.

Find out more:

- Get safety tips online at www.safekidscanada.ca.
- Call Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children at 1-888-SAFE-TIPS (723-3847).
- Contact your local public health unit.

Need more information?

EatRight Ontario has sound advice on nutrition and healthy eating. Visit them online at www.ontario.ca/eatright. Ontario residents can speak to a registered dietitian by calling the EatRight Ontario toll-free information service at 1-877-510-510-2.

Books and publications

- *Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense*. Ellyn Satter, 2000.
- *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family: Orchestrating and enjoying the family meal*. Ellyn Satter, 2008.
- *Raising Vegetarian Children - A Guide to Good Health and Family Harmony*. J. Stephaniak and V. Melina, 2003.
- *Better Food for Kids: Your Essential Guide to Nutrition for all Children from age 2 to 6*. J. Saab and D. Kalnins, 2002.
- *Moving and Growing Series: Physical Activities for Twos, Threes and Fours and Physical Activities for Fives and Sixes*. Canadian Child Care Federation, 2004.
- *Purposeful Play: Early Childhood Movement Activities on a Budget*. Renee McCall, Diane Craft, 2004.
- *Developing Physical Literacy: A Guide For Parents Of Children Ages 0-12*. Supplement to Canadian Sport for Life.
Available at: <http://www.sasksport.sk.ca/CS4L/DPL.html>.

Websites

- EatRight Ontario: www.ontario.ca/eatright
- Allergy/Asthma Information Association: www.aaia.ca
- Anaphylaxis Canada: www.anaphylaxis.ca
- Canada's Food Guide: www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide
- ParticipACTION: www.participaction.com
- Dietitians of Canada: www.dietitians.ca
- Healthy Start for Life: www.dietitians.ca/healthystart
- Nutrition for Kids: www.nutritionforkids.com
- Understanding the nutrition label: www.healthyeatingisinstore.ca
- Recipes for produce in season and more: www.foodland.gov.on.ca
- Active Healthy Kids Canada: www.activehealthykids.ca
- Safe Kids Canada: www.safekidscanada.ca
- Mothers in motion: <http://www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion/e/baby/index.cfm>

Contacts

Consult your public health unit or community health centre for information, referrals, handouts and more about healthy eating, physical activity and safety.

- To find out where your local public health unit is, visit www.alphaweb.org and click on "Health units," then "Ontario's health units."
- To find out where your local community health centre is, visit www.aohc.org and click on "Find a centre near you."

Acknowledgements

The Nutrition Resource Centre at the Ontario Public Health Association thanks the following organizations and individuals for their assistance in creating this resource:

Laura Atkinson, BSc, RD

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Public Health Nutritionist, Durham Region Health Department

Ellen Lakusiak, MSc, RD

Ottawa Public Health

Stephanie Love, BSc, RD

Public Health Dietitian, Brant County Health Unit

Barb Pimento, ECE, BA, MHSc

Professor, George Brown College, School of Early Childhood

Mary Turfryer, MHSc, RD

Public Health Nutritionist, York Region Community and Health Services



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This resource was funded by the Government of Ontario as part of Ontario's Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living. October 2009.