



# EAT RIGHT BE ACTIVE

*A Guide for Caregivers of  
Toddlers 12 - 36 Months*



NUTRITION RESOURCE CENTRE

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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! Be a good role model.

**Note:** In this booklet, “toddler” refers to children 12 - 36 months old. Both “him” and “her” are used throughout to describe your toddler. “Caregivers” refers to parents, other adult family members, or anyone else involved in your child’s day-to-day care. “Health care provider” refers to doctors, 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 or shorter, lighter or heavier than other toddlers of the same age.

What is most important is the overall growth pattern, not the height or weight at any one time. Ask about the growth pattern of your child when you are visiting his health care provider.

If you are concerned about your child’s eating habits, or growth and development, check out the nutrition screen tool called Nutri-eSTEP ([www.nutritionscreen.ca](http://www.nutritionscreen.ca)) to get more information. The toddler version is made for children 18 - 36 months of age.

### Growth depends on many factors

GOOD TO KNOW!

- Family - parents’ size and shape
- 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: *A Health Professional’s Guide for using the WHO Growth Charts for Canada*, Dietitians of Canada, 2014

# 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 her hands. She also learns to feed herself by watching you, so eat together often. Let her do most of it herself and don't get upset by the mess. The more she practices, the more skilled she will become.

## 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 how much to eat at meal and snack times. 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 milk (3.25% M.F.)?

Yes  No

Breastfeeding is encouraged until 24 months or longer. If your child is not breastfed, offer homogenized (3.25% M.F.) cow's milk until 24 months of age. At 24 months, switch to skim, 1% or 2% milk. Offer 500 mL (2 cups) of milk each day. Do not offer more than 750 mL (3 cups) per day. Find out more about milk on page 8.

**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: How to help your toddler eat well

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

- **Eat the same meal together.** Offer your child the same foods as the rest of the family. Providing her with the same meal will encourage her to explore new foods, and develop healthy habits. Make mealtimes a pleasant family time. Your good example will teach her how to enjoy healthy foods and practice learning mealtime skills (e.g., how to use utensils).
- **Offer her a variety of healthy foods with at least one familiar food.** Let her decide what and how much to eat—if anything at all. She knows best if 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.** Offer a routine of 3 meals and 2 - 3 snacks, separated by 2 ½ - 3 hours. Water can be offered as desired.
- **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.
- **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 or mobile devices (e.g., cell phones).** This will help her to focus on eating without distractions.
- **Let her eat at her own pace.** Some meals may take 10 minutes and other meals 20 minutes. Allow her to decide when she is finished eating. Keep mealtimes no more than 30 minutes and let her leave the table when she is done.

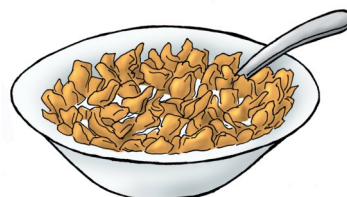
## Hungry or full?

Your child knows if she is hungry or full. She may show you she is hungry by reaching or asking for more food. She may show you she is full by eating more slowly or playing with her food. Pressuring or bribing her may make her less willing to eat and prevents her from understanding when she is hungry and full.

GOOD TO KNOW!

# What to serve your toddler every day

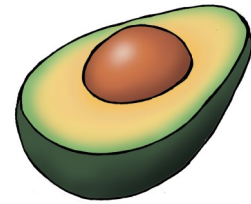
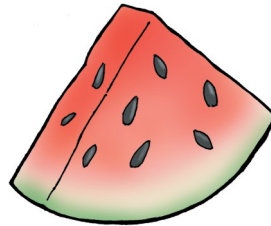
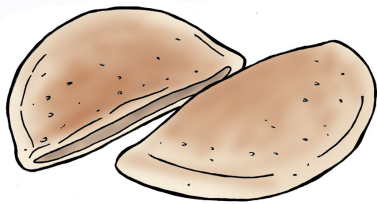
- Meals that include a variety of foods from at least three of the four food groups, to benefit from the different nutrients each group provides: Vegetables and Fruit, Grain Products, Milk and Alternatives, Meat and Alternatives.
- Snacks should include foods from at least two food groups; at least one snack should include a choice of vegetable and/or fruit.
- Meals and snacks that look appealing – with a variety of colours, tastes and textures such as grated, diced and soft pieces.
- A variety of vegetables and fruit. Include dark green ones such as bok choy, green peas, brussels sprouts and broccoli, and orange ones such as pumpkin, carrots, cantaloupe, sweet potato, squash, apricots and peaches.
- Whole foods (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, unhealthy fats, added sugars and lower in fibre.
- Whole grains, which are higher in fibre, vitamins and minerals than highly processed grain products (e.g., white bread). Try oatmeal, barley, cream of wheat, quinoa, brown rice, whole grain cereals, breads, crackers and pastas. Be aware that when food packages say "made with whole grain", there is often only a small amount of whole grain. Look for "100% whole grain" products.
- Iron-rich foods: Animal sources include red meats, poultry (dark meat has more iron than white meat), eggs and fish\*. Plant-based sources include beans, lentils, tofu and iron-fortified grain products. Include foods high in vitamin C when having a plant-based source of iron to help the body absorb iron. Foods high in vitamin C include oranges, strawberries, cabbage, snow peas, red peppers and broccoli.



\*For tips on choosing fish wisely, see page 14.

# What to serve your toddler every day, continued

- Foods prepared with little or no added sugar and salt.
- Some nutritious higher fat foods: meats, cheese, avocado and nut or seed butters. Select varieties with no added salt and sugar.
- Breastmilk: breastfeed or offer expressed breastmilk in an open cup.



## Small tummies fill up fast

Make every bite count! Your toddler needs a variety of nutrients for good health. Offering him a wide array of healthy foods and beverages will help him to get all the nutrition he needs. Special toddler foods such as rice rusks and food puffs are not necessary. Serve him cut-up pieces of the same foods the rest of your family eats. Consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages such as fruit drinks, punches and cocktails as well as processed foods (e.g., French fries) can decrease toddlers' appetites for healthier foods.

GOOD TO KNOW!

# 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. Serve drinks in an open cup.

## What drinks should I offer?

- **Breastmilk.** Breastfeeding is recommended until 24 months old or longer. Toddlers who are breastfed or receiving a combination of breastmilk and other milk need a daily vitamin D supplement of 400 IU until 24 months old.
- **Tap water.** Offer 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 or well water is unsafe.
- **Milk and fortified soy beverages.** Toddlers need 500 mL (2 cups) each day. More than 750 mL (3 cups) each day can replace other healthy foods and could lead to low iron levels. Until 24 months of age, serve homogenized (3.25% M.F.) milk. At 24 months, switch to skim, 1%, or 2% milk. Offer plain, unsweetened milk in ½ cup servings with meals and snacks. If your child is not breastfed and cannot drink cow's milk, talk to your health care provider about suitable alternatives. A fortified soy beverage can be given after 24 months. Other plant-based beverages (e.g., rice, almond, coconut) are low in nutrients required for a child's growth and are not recommended. Note that toddlers who are breastfeeding several times a day may not need other sources of milk.
- **Juice.** Limit or avoid juice and offer vegetables and fruit instead. Juice leaves less room for healthy food choices and can also lead to tooth decay and diarrhea. If juice is served, choose 100% juice and limit to no more than 125 mL (½ cup) per day. Diluting juice with water does not lower the risk of tooth decay.
- **Avoid sweetened beverages.** Toddlers do not need sugary fruit punches, drinks, beverages, cocktails, energy drinks, lemonade, iced tea or soft drinks. These take the place of healthier foods, may cause tooth decay and do not help children grow well.



### When should drinks be offered?

Breastfeed or serve milk at meals and snacks; only offer water between meals. Sipping on milk, juice or any other sugary beverage between meals can lead to tooth decay and spoil your child's appetite.

GOOD TO KNOW!

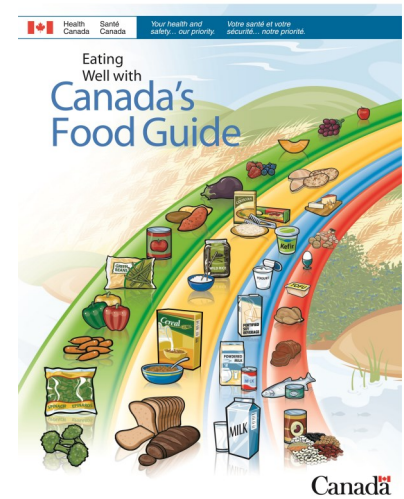
Source: *Nutrition for Healthy Term Infants: Recommendations from Six to 24 Months*, Health Canada, Canadian Paediatric Society, Dietitians of Canada, and the Breastfeeding Committee for Canada (2014).


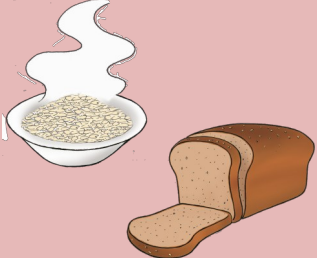


# How much food does my toddler need?

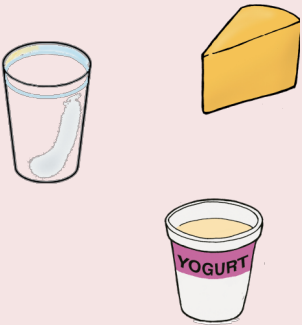
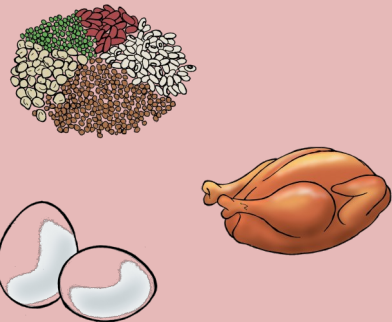
**For toddlers 12 - 24 months**, offer a variety of foods from each of the four food groups in Canada's Food Guide every day. Let your toddler decide how much to eat from what you provide at meal and snack times. **Offer small portions (about ¼ to ½ of a Food Guide serving) and let them ask for more if they are still hungry.**

**For toddlers 24 months and older**, Canada's Food Guide gives recommendations on the number of servings for each food group each day. Food Guide servings can be divided into smaller amounts that are offered at different meal and snack times. Continue to offer your child small portions (about ½ to one Food Guide serving) and let your toddler decide how much to eat. Continue to breastfeed your toddler until age two or longer. Use the chart below to help plan meals and snacks.



Food group	Age 24-36 months	What is one Food Guide serving?
<p><b>Vegetables and Fruit</b> Offer one dark green and one orange vegetable each day.</p> 	4 Food Guide servings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 medium vegetable or fruit</li> <li>• 125 mL (½ cup) of fresh, frozen or canned vegetables, tomato sauce</li> <li>• 250 mL (1 cup) of leafy raw vegetables or salad</li> </ul>
<p><b>Grain Products</b> Offer whole grain products each day.</p> 	3 Food Guide servings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 slice of whole grain bread</li> <li>• ½ bagel or small whole grain muffin</li> <li>• ½ pita or large tortilla</li> <li>• 125 mL (½ cup) of cooked rice, bulgur, quinoa, pasta or couscous</li> <li>• 175 mL (¾ cup) of hot cereal</li> <li>• 30 g of cold cereal</li> </ul>

# How much food does my toddler need? (continued)

Food group	Age 24-36 months	What is one Food Guide serving?
<p><b>Milk and Alternatives</b> Offer skim, 1%, or 2% milk each day.</p> 	<p>2 Food Guide servings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 250 mL (1 cup) of cow's milk or fortified soy beverage</li> <li>• 175 g (¾ cup) of yogurt</li> <li>• 50 g (1 ½ oz) of hard cheese</li> <li>• Plant-based beverages other than fortified soy beverage (e.g., rice, almond, coconut) are low in protein and not always fortified with vitamin D required for a child's growth. They are not part of the Milk and Alternatives food group.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Meat and Alternatives</b> Offer alternatives such as beans, lentils and tofu often.</p> 	<p>1 Food Guide serving</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 eggs</li> <li>• 30 mL (2 tbsp) of peanut butter or other nut butters</li> <li>• 60 mL (¼ cup) of shelled nuts or seeds</li> <li>• 125 mL (½ cup) of cooked fish, shellfish, poultry, lean meat or game meat</li> <li>• 175 mL (¾ cup) of hummus, tofu or cooked legumes such as kidney beans, chickpeas and lentils</li> </ul>

Source: *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*, Health Canada, 2007



Canada

## 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 information and videos on feeding children, including healthy recipes and meal planning advice, at [www.unlockfood.ca](http://www.unlockfood.ca).

\*For toddlers ages 24 - 36 months, 2 Food Guide servings of Milk and Alternatives per day is recommended (500 mL/2 cups total of milk).

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
<b>Breakfast</b>	Plain oatmeal Berries (fresh or frozen) Milk*	Scrambled egg with spinach Whole grain tortilla Grated cheese Milk*	Homemade whole grain banana muffin Nut butter Milk*
<b>Morning snack</b>	Cheese cubes Peeled and cut up apple Water	Whole grain toast Mashed avocado and tomato slices Water	Fruit smoothie (yogurt, milk and fruit)
<b>Lunch</b>	Whole grain egg sandwich Grated carrots Cut up strawberries Water	Veggie chili Brown rice Cucumber (cut lengthwise) Cut up cantaloupe Milk*	Chicken and veggie stir-fry (e.g., bok choy, carrots, snow peas) Whole grain noodles Peeled and cut up pear Milk*
<b>After-noon snack</b>	Hummus Cut up vegetables (e.g., sweet peppers, cucumber) Water	Plain and/or Greek yogurt Peach slices Water	Cottage cheese Cut up grapes Water
<b>Dinner</b>	Baked salmon Cooked carrots and green beans Whole grain quinoa Milk*	Baked chicken breast Sweet potato Steamed greens Whole grain couscous Milk*	Dhal or lentil curry Steamed cauliflower & kale Whole grain naan or chapatti Cut up mango Milk*
<b>Evening snack</b>	Banana slices and nut butter Whole grain toast Milk*	Clementine Milk*	Whole grain cereal Blueberries Milk*

Based on *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*, Health Canada (2007).

# Get the best nutrition for your money

- Buy fresh vegetables and fruit in season. At other times, buy plain, frozen fruits or vegetables. Canned fruit packed in juice (drained) and canned vegetables low in sodium are also good choices.
- 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 brown rice and flavour it yourself. Choose low-sugar cereals (6 g of sugar or less per serving). Flavour your own oatmeal with cinnamon or cut-up fruit.
- 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.

## Label reading made easy

Eating well 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 size on each brand to see if you are comparing similar amounts.

**Step 2.** Look at the % Daily Value (% DV). 5% DV or less is a little. 15% DV or more is a lot. Use the % DV to compare food products to make healthier choices.

**Step 3.** Nutrients you may want more of are fibre, calcium and iron.

**Step 4.** Nutrients you may want less of are saturated fat, trans fat, sugar and sodium.

Nutrition Facts	
Per 90 g serving (2 slices)	
Amount	% Daily Value
<b>Calories</b> 170	
<b>Fat</b> 2.7 g	4 %
Saturated 0.5 g	5 %
+ Trans 0 g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0 mg	
<b>Sodium</b> 200 mg	8 %
<b>Carbohydrate</b> 36 g	13 %
Fibre 6 g	24 %
Sugars 3 g	
<b>Protein</b> 8 g	
Vitamin A 1 %	Vitamin C 0 %
Calcium 2 %	Iron 16 %

## Find out more:

To learn more about label reading, visit the Healthy Canadians website: [www.healthycanadians.gc.ca](http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca). Select "Food and nutrition" and then "Food labels". You can also visit Unlock Food: [www.unlockfood.ca](http://www.unlockfood.ca) and search "nutrition label".

\*For tips on choosing fish wisely, see page 14.

# Top feeding challenges

1

**Challenge: My child wants to eat a certain 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; adding herbs and spices to ground meats can also improve acceptance. Serve other foods high in protein and iron, 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 child 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:

- Offering soft-cooked veggies with yogurt, tzatziki, hummus dip or cheese sauce.
- Adding extra pureed vegetables into soups, sauces and stews.
- Serving fruit daily. Many of the nutrients in vegetables are also found in fruit.

4

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

**Solution:** Explain that coaxing children to eat can eventually lead to food refusal or over eating. The caregiver's job is to decide what, where and when to offer food and the child's job is to decide how much and whether they eat the 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 child off the bottle.**

**Solution:** If you have decided to give your child a bottle and now she does not want to drink from a cup, try replacing the mid-day bottle with a cup. Use an open cup rather than a sippy cup. Once she is used to this, take another bottle away. Continue 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 a Telehealth Ontario Registered Dietitian at 1-866-797-0000.

# Fun food adventures

## Help your toddler become more familiar with new foods.

- Visit a farm or farmers' market. Try a pick-your-own or other farms open to the public.
- 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.
- Smell foods, herbs and spices you are using while preparing meals.
- Help find ingredients in the fridge or cupboards.
- Explore diverse foods such as star fruit, papaya, bok choy or bannock.
- Cook together. Very young children like to explore with their senses of sight, touch, smell, hearing and tasting. They also like to do things on their own. Try letting your kids:
  - Wash fruits and vegetables in the sink
  - Add items to dishes (like chopped tofu to a casserole)
  - Put paper liners into muffin tins

Remember to get your toddler in the habit of hand washing with warm water and soap for at least 15 seconds before and after eating or cooking, and after using the bathroom or touching animals. For more information on safe food practices visit: [www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Food-safety](http://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Food-safety).

## Fabulous fish



GOOD TO KNOW!

Many fish and shellfish are healthy and safe for the entire family to eat.

Fish provides protein as well as many nutrients and essential fats. The healthy fats help in the normal development of the brain and eye in unborn and young children. Serve fish or shellfish at least twice a week. Choose fish and shellfish that are low in mercury, such as cod, haddock, rainbow trout, tilapia, sardines, salmon (including canned salmon), canned 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 Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.
- To learn about the fish that are safe to eat in your area, see the Government of Ontario's *Guide to Eating Ontario Fish*, listed on page 26.

# 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 ½ - 1 cm (¼ - ½ 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. Stringy fruits and vegetables such as celery and pineapple should be finely chopped.
4. Spread peanut butter or other nut butter thinly. Never serve it from a spoon.
5. Cut hot dogs and sausages into long strips and then into bite-sized pieces. (Note: select plain or unseasoned meat most often and processed meats such as deli and luncheon meats, sausage and hot dogs less often).
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 cooked beans and chickpeas as finger foods, or puree them into soups or dips.
9. Do not give children under 4 years of age hard, round foods such as whole nuts, seeds, grapes, raisins, popcorn, candies or olives.
10. Do not use toothpicks or skewers.

# Be careful with foods that can cause choking (continued)

## Tips for eating

- Have your child 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 cannot supervise her while driving. A sudden stop could make her choke, and it may not be safe for you to pull over if she needs help.

GOOD TO  
KNOW!

### Concerned about gagging?

Sometimes when children swallow food, some of the food gets too far back on the tongue and causes a gag reflex. This is common and 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. Avoiding foods without a diagnosed food allergy is not recommended. Your child may be missing important nutrients for growth and development when certain foods or food groups are avoided.

## Know the signs of an allergic reaction

### Stop feeding a food if you think it's 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.

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:

- Food Allergy Canada: [www.foodallergycanada.ca](http://www.foodallergycanada.ca)
- Healthy Canadians: [www.healthycanadians.gc.ca](http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca) (select "Food & nutrition", then select "Food allergies & intolerances")

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 your child's 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.

**NOTE:** For more tips, see Drinks Matter on page 8.

## 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 skilled at physical activity and sports will not necessarily come naturally as your toddler grows. She needs you to teach her the building blocks of movement 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, playground equipment, nature, or even just your bodies!

### Daily activity needs of toddlers

Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines\* recommend: toddlers (aged 1 – 2 years) and preschoolers (aged 3 – 4 years) should accumulate at least 180 minutes of physical activity at any intensity spread throughout the day including:

- A variety of activities in different environments
- Activities that develop movement skills

Being active as a toddler means:

- Any activity that gets kids moving
- Climbing stairs and moving around the home
- Playing outside and exploring their environment
- Crawling, brisk walking, running or dancing

\*Source: *Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for the Early Years (ages 0-4 years)*, [www.csep.ca/guidelines](http://www.csep.ca/guidelines).

# Be active: The basics (continued)

## Minimize sedentary time

The older children get, the more energetic play they need, such as hopping, jumping, skipping and bike riding. For healthy growth and development, **caregivers should minimize the time toddlers and preschoolers spend being sedentary during waking hours**, including prolonged sitting or being restrained (e.g., stroller, high chair) for more than one hour at a time.

GOOD TO  
KNOW!

### Limiting screen time

For children under 2 years, screen time is not recommended. For children 2 - 4 years, screen time should be limited to under one hour per day. Less is better.

Source: *Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for the Early Years (ages 0-4 years)*, [www.csep.ca/guidelines](http://www.csep.ca/guidelines).

# Why active play is important

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

Active play helps young kids:

- Increase fitness and build healthy hearts
- Improve flexibility and coordination
- Improve sleep habits
- Have fun and feel happy
- Enjoy time with family and friends
- Build self-esteem and self-confidence
- Improve learning and attention
- Develop movement skills and positive lifelong attitudes toward physical activity
- Develop strong bones and muscles
- Develop good posture and balance

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. 30 minutes of moderate, daily physical activity lowers stress, increases your energy, and helps you sleep better ... just to name a few of the benefits. Check out some of these ideas to help fit physical activity into your daily routine:

- Walk or bike whenever possible.
- 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.
- Download or look online for fitness videos you can do while your child is playing nearby or napping.
- Try a new class once a week at your local community centre. Some programs even include childcare.
- Keep running shoes in your car and go for a walk if you find extra time in your day, such as waiting for a delayed appointment.

## Activity checklist for toddlers

Each toddler is different, but this basic checklist can give you some sense of how 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 throwing 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), available at [www.ndds.ca](http://www.ndds.ca).

# 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 holding on to furniture
- Picking up toys from the floor
- Pushing or pulling toys
- 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, texture, 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 participating.

- 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 active songs you used 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.
- Sign out fitness resources from the library, or search online for fitness videos and try them 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 and 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 and 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 childcare 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, or invent parachute games using bed sheets. Use your imagination. The sky's the limit!



# 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 10:00 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.

**Playgrounds.** 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. Remove anything from your child's clothing that has potential for harm, such as the drawstrings on her jacket and scarves.

## Find out more

- Get safety tips online at [www.parachutecanada.org](http://www.parachutecanada.org).
- Contact your local public health unit. Find your local public health unit by going to [www.health.gov.on.ca](http://www.health.gov.on.ca) (select "Health Services in Your Community", "Public Health Units" and then "Public Health Unit Locations").

## Need more information?

### Unlock Food & Telehealth Ontario

For more information on nutrition and healthy eating, visit Unlock Food at: [www.unlockfood.ca](http://www.unlockfood.ca).

You can also speak to a Registered Dietitian by calling Telehealth Ontario's toll-free telephone information service at 1-866-797-0000.

### Other Websites

- Active for Life: [www.activeforlife.com](http://www.activeforlife.com)
- Allergy/Asthma Information Association: [www.aaia.ca](http://www.aaia.ca)
- Allergy Aware: [www.allergyaware.ca](http://www.allergyaware.ca)
- Anaphylaxis Canada: [www.anaphylaxis.ca](http://www.anaphylaxis.ca)
- Best Start Resource Centre: [www.beststart.org](http://www.beststart.org)
- Canada's Food Guide: [www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide)
- Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines: [www.csep.ca/guidelines](http://www.csep.ca/guidelines)
- Dietitians of Canada: [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca)
- Ellyn Satter: [www.ellynsatterinstitute.org](http://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org)
- Family Food Patch Youtube video series: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB1cquEpGBcspH-K1H6hpNQ>
- Food Allergy Canada: [www.foodallergycanada.ca/](http://www.foodallergycanada.ca/)
- Foodland Ontario - Local Food Recipes: [www.ontario.ca/foodland-ontario](http://www.ontario.ca/foodland-ontario)
- Government of Ontario - Guide to Eating Ontario Fish (2017-18): <https://www.ontario.ca/page/eating-ontario-fish-2017-18>
- Have a Ball Together!: [haveaballtogether.ca](http://haveaballtogether.ca)

- Nutri-eSTEP: Nutrition Screening Tool for Toddlers and Preschoolers: [www.nutritionscreen.ca](http://www.nutritionscreen.ca)
- Parachute Canada: [www.parachutecanada.org](http://www.parachutecanada.org)
- ParticipACTION: [www.participaction.com](http://www.participaction.com)
- Raising our Healthy Kids: [www.raisingourhealthykids.com/](http://www.raisingourhealthykids.com/)

### Contacts

Consult your public health unit, community health centre or family health team 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.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx).
- To find out where your local community health centre is, visit [www.aohc.org](http://www.aohc.org) and click on "Find a centre".
- To find out where your local family health team is, visit [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/fht/fht\\_progress.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/fht/fht_progress.aspx).

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