

# WHAT CONSTITUTES A HEALTHY BALANCED DIET FOR TODDLERS? FACTSHEET

**Giving children a healthy balanced diet ensures they will be getting all the essential macro- and micro-nutrients they need for growth and development, and helps lay the foundations for making healthy food choices when they are older.**



## What should toddlers eat?

Children in the early years need to eat a balanced diet that is nutritious and can meet their needs for growth, development and activity<sup>1</sup>. Meals and snacks should be made up from the 5 food groups<sup>2</sup>:

- Starchy foods such as bread, rice, potatoes, pasta
- Fruit and vegetables
- Dairy foods such as milk, cheese and yogurt
- Protein foods such as meat, fish, eggs, nuts and pulses
- Fats such as oils, butter and fat spread (including omega 3 and 6)

In order to achieve a balanced diet, the British Nutrition Foundation (BNF) suggests serving 3 meals and some snacks daily following the '5532' principle<sup>3</sup>:

- 5 x Starchy foods a-day
- 5 x Fruit & vegetables a-day
- 3 x Dairy foods a-day
- 2 x Protein foods\* a-day
- \*3 portions if child is vegetarian

## How much should a toddler eat?

How much a toddler eats will vary daily due to appetite. At this age the stomach capacity is still quite small, about the size of a toddlers clenched fist, so they can't manage large meals. Food needs to be provided at regular intervals, aiming for 3 meals and 2-3 snacks in between<sup>4</sup>. As there is little in the way of official guidance for how much food is required for this age group, advice is to keep meal sizes small and allow children to ask for more if they are hungry<sup>5</sup>.

## Does the toddler diet need supplementing?

Department of Health (DoH) advice in the United Kingdom (UK) is that all children aged 1-4 years should be given a supplement of vitamins A, C and D daily<sup>6</sup>. If children in this age group are receiving any formula or follow on milk, they do not need supplementing if their intake is >500mls per day. If a child is receiving milk designed for toddlers, care should be taken to ensure consumption is sufficient to achieve the recommended daily intake for vitamin D.

## What about drinks?

From the age of 12 months, the best drinks for toddlers are water, breastmilk, whole cow's milk, toddler milk, or fortified unsweetened plant-based milk alternatives suitable for aged 1+. Sweetened drinks should be avoided to minimise the risk of developing dental caries. Recommendations for intake are for 1.1-1.2 litres per day for 1-2 years of age, and 1.3 litres per day for 2-3 years of age<sup>7</sup>.

### REFERENCES:

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