

Feeding Toddlers and Preschoolers



Children need less food than adults. What may seem like a small amount to an adult may be the right amount for a child. Children are capable of “listening” to their body cues and will stop eating when they are full. Your role as a caregiver is to foster this natural ability. Not paying attention to hunger and fullness cues can lead to overeating or turn children off to foods they should be eating.

What is a serving?

In general, a toddler-size portion is $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ an adult size portion. A preschooler-size portion is close to or the same size as an adults. For example, a one-year-old child would get a one-quarter serving, while a 3-year-old would get a half.

NOTE: this refers to serving sizes recommended by ChooseMyPlate, not portions served in many restaurants.

A good general rule is to serve about 1 tablespoon per year of age for each type of food offered.

See the table below for specific examples.

Type of Food	1-2 year old	3-4 year old	5-6 year old
Grains and Breads	$\frac{1}{4}$ slice bread 2 tbsp cereal 2 tbsp rice or pasta	$\frac{1}{2}$ slice bread $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cereal $\frac{1}{4}$ cup rice or pasta	1 slice bread $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cereal $\frac{1}{3}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup rice or pasta
Dairy	$\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup whole milk $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$ slice cheese 2 tbsp yogurt	$\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup skim/low fat milk $\frac{1}{2}$ slice cheese $\frac{1}{4}$ cup yogurt	$\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 cup skim/low fat milk 1 slice cheese $\frac{1}{2}$ cup yogurt
Fruit and Veggies	2 tbsp cooked or canned 2-3 pieces fresh $\frac{1}{4}$ small whole fruit	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup cooked or canned 4-5 pieces fresh $\frac{1}{2}$ small whole fruit	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked or canned 6-7 pieces fresh 1 small whole fruit
Meat and Meat Substitutes	1 oz meat* 1 tbsp nut butter $\frac{1}{2}$ large egg 2 tbsp beans/peas 1-2 tbsp tofu	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz meat* 1-2 tbsp nut butter $\frac{3}{4}$ large egg $\frac{1}{4}$ cup beans/peas 2-3 tbsp tofu	2 oz meat* 2 tbsp nut butter 1 large egg $\frac{1}{2}$ cup beans/peas $\frac{1}{4}$ cup tofu

*For reference, 3 oz of cooked meat is about the size of a deck of cards.

Always start with one serving of each food and then let the child decide how much to eat. If he or she is still hungry, they can ask for more food.

Tip:
Not sure what a tablespoon or a ¼ cup of food looks like?
Use measuring spoons and cups to portion out foods for a few days until you learn what the appropriate portion size looks like on your plates and bowls.

Tip:
Offering two or three types of fruits and vegetables at each meal will help children meet the daily recommendations.



How do I know if a child who can't talk yet is full?

Watch for these signs:

- ▶ pulling away from the spoon
- ▶ turning away/become distracted
- ▶ no longer opening mouth for food
- ▶ pushing food or spoon back out of the mouth
- ▶ throwing the food on the floor/playing
- ▶ shaking head “no”

Children's appetites change from day to day. It is okay if your child does not eat a whole serving or asks for more food. **DON'T force more food or stop your hungry child from eating. DO provide meals and snacks at the same time every day and offer a variety of foods in child size servings.** Trust your child to eat the amount that is right for him or her.

**Be a great role model!
Eat your fruits and veggies!
Mix it up!**

Resources: 1) eatright.org - American Dietetic Association 2) www.extension.org - University of Maine Cooperative Extension