



United States Department of Agriculture

Food and Nutrition Service



Mealtimes With Toddlers

in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

Mealtimes With Toddlers in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

Meals and snacks offered through the United States Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program help support children's growth and development. Mealtimes at child care can also help children:

- Learn healthy habits,
- Practice feeding themselves,
- Explore new foods, and
- Strengthen their ability to use a spoon, fork, and cup.

Toddlers, children 1-2 years of age, are growing and developing quickly. They are learning about themselves and the world around them, even at mealtimes. This booklet is designed to assist child care providers with questions they may have about mealtimes with toddlers.



Look inside for information on how to:

- Assist children in learning how to feed themselves (**Page 3**)
- Encourage children to try new foods (**Page 4**)
- Choose the right type of milk to serve children in the CACFP (**Page 5**)
- Offer vegetables and fruit at meals and snacks (**Page 7**)
- Share toddler successes with families (**Page 8**)

LOOK WHAT I CAN DO!



I can eat with a spoon and my fingers, but I'm still learning how to eat safely. See **page 7** for tips on reducing the risk of choking.



Assist Children in Learning How to Feed Themselves

Toddlers are excited to learn new skills. You can help toddlers become more independent while still providing supervision and gentle support at mealtimes. You'll be helping them to develop important skills they'll use for life.

You can help toddlers learn to feed themselves by:

- Offering foods in bite-size pieces that are easier to pick up with their fingers.
- Allowing toddlers to practice eating with spoons and forks at mealtimes.
- Using tables, chairs, forks, spoons, bowls, and plates designed for children.
- Modeling how to use a spoon or fork at mealtimes.

Meals with toddlers can be messy. Cut down on the mess by:

- Putting a towel, paper, or mat under the children's chairs. This will catch food and spills that fall to the ground.
- Teaching children to clean up the mess.
- Using rubber bibs with pockets with each child to catch the food.
- Letting children continue to practice feeding themselves. As they strengthen their skills, they will create less mess.

Rubber bibs with pockets can help reduce messes.



Bite-size pieces measure ½ inch or less.



actual size



Use forks with rounded tips that are made for toddlers.



Encourage Children to Try New Foods


Introducing toddlers to new foods allows them to experience new textures. Soft, lumpy, and crunchy foods can help toddlers strengthen their chewing skills. It can also help them get used to new foods and textures early on in life, so they are more accepting of foods as they grow.

You can encourage 1-2 year olds to try new foods by:

- Introducing a new food outside of mealtimes through reading, gardening, and food activities.
- Offering a new food with a food they like.
- Talking about the taste, texture, smell, and color of the food at mealtime.

Teachers and toddlers can encourage each other at mealtime. Try this!

- Plan where toddlers sit around the table. Toddlers who need more help can sit closer to you. Toddlers who need a bit more encouragement can sit next to children who are more adventurous eaters.
- Show by example that a new food tastes good by eating foods together with the children.

 **Go on your own taste adventure!** Set a personal goal to try a few new vegetables and fruits at home. Or, have a taste test with the teachers at your child care site.

Start Simple with MyPlate

Check out USDA's "Start Simple with MyPlate" mobile app to help set your personal goals and stick with them! Find more information at choosemyplate.gov/startsimpleapp.



LOOK WHAT I CAN DO!



I like to learn about everything, even food. I may not like a food the first time I try it, but please keep offering it to me! You may need to offer a food to me more than 10 times before I like it.

Choose the Right Type of Milk to Serve Children in the CACFP

1 Year Olds

The CACFP meal pattern for 1-2 year olds allows time for children to get used to milk with different amounts of fat. To serve fluid milk as part of a reimbursable meal, offer:

- Breastmilk and/or iron-fortified infant formula from birth to 1 year of age.
- Breastmilk, iron-fortified infant formula, and/or unflavored whole milk from 12 to 13 months of age.
- Breastmilk and/or unflavored whole milk from 13 months to 2 years of age.

LOOK WHAT I CAN DO!



I can drink from a cup. When I turn one, start adding whole milk to my cup of iron-fortified infant formula. Slowly increase the amount of whole milk offered over the next few weeks.



2 Year Olds

At this age, you can offer:

- Breastmilk, unflavored whole, unflavored reduced-fat (2%), unflavored low-fat (1%), and unflavored fat-free (skim) milk from 24 to 25 months of age.
- Breastmilk, unflavored low-fat (1%), and unflavored fat-free (skim) milk from 2 through 5 years of age.

What about formula made for toddlers?

Most children do not need formula once they turn one. Formulas made for toddlers are sometimes called “transition formulas,” “toddler formulas,” or “toddler milks.” Children usually do not need them unless it’s for a medical reason. A signed medical statement is needed before serving the “toddler formula” as part of a reimbursable meal or snack.



Questions about milk?

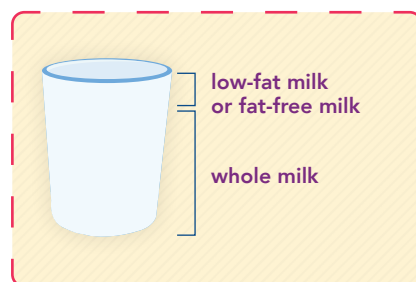
Contact your State agency or sponsoring organization if you have any questions about milk requirements in the CACFP.

How can 2 year olds get used to milk with less fat?

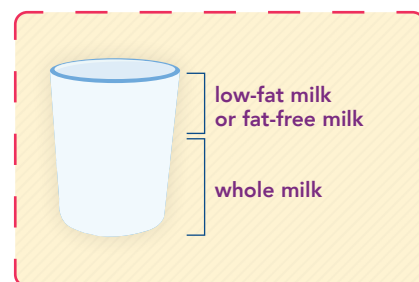
Help children get used to low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk when they turn 2 years old by adding some low-fat or fat-free milk to their cup of whole milk. Gradually increase the amount of low-fat or fat-free milk offered over the course of a few weeks.

Example:

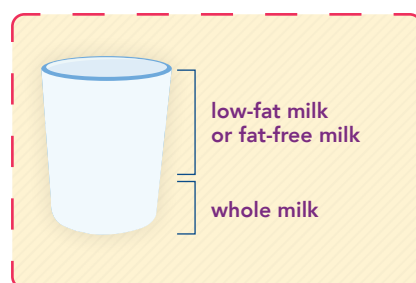
Week 1



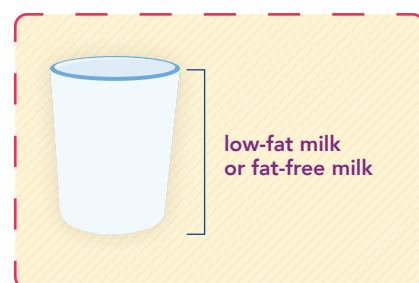
Week 2



Week 3



Week 4



Instead of milk, you may serve unflavored milk substitutes that are nutritionally equivalent to cow’s milk without a medical statement. There are no fat requirements for milk substitutes.

Offer a Variety of Vegetables and Fruit at Meals and Snacks

Toddlers are eager to learn, especially at mealtimes. Let them try different foods by offering a variety of vegetables, fruit, and other items on the menu.

Check Out This One-Day Sample Menu for Ideas!

–BREAKFAST–



½ cup (½ oz eq) toasted o's cereal

1-year-olds:

½ cup (4 fl oz) unflavored whole milk



¼ cup diced strawberries

2-year-olds:

½ cup (4 fl oz) unflavored low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk

–LUNCH/SUPPER–



Chicken, vegetable, and rice bowls made with:

1 oz (1 oz eq) shredded chicken

¼ cup (½ oz eq) cooked brown rice

1-year-olds:

½ cup (4 fl oz) unflavored whole milk

⅛ cup steamed bite-size broccoli florets

⅛ cup cooked, diced carrots

2-year-olds:

½ cup (4 fl oz) unflavored low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk

–SNACK–



½ cup baked apple sticks



½ cup baked sweet potato sticks

Offer and make water available all day.

fl oz = fluid ounces

oz = ounces

oz eq = ounce equivalent

How can I prepare vegetables and fruit to lower the risk of choking?

Cherry tomatoes, grapes, carrots, apples, and other vegetables and fruit can increase a toddler's risk of choking. To prepare foods to lower the risk of choking you can:



Cut cherry tomatoes and grapes lengthwise, then cut into smaller pieces no larger than ½ inch.



Remove large seeds and pits and cut into smaller pieces no larger than ½ inch.



Cook hard vegetables until they are soft.



Cut raw vegetables and fruit, like cucumber and apples, into small thin strips or slices.

Sharing Toddler Successes With Families

It can be hard to talk with parents/caregivers at pick up time about everything their toddler did that day. Try starting the conversation by sending toddlers home with “badges” about their mealtime accomplishments.

I tried a new vegetable today!



The name of the vegetable is:

_____.

We talked about the shape, color, and texture and then I tried it.

I tried a new fruit today!



The name of the fruit is:

_____.

We talked about the shape, color, and texture and then I tried it.

I used a cup today!



We practiced holding and tipping the cup slowly to our mouths.

I used a spoon today!



I was able to feed myself. Some food dropped on the floor, but that's okay! My teacher had a mat on the floor to catch the mess.



Looking for another way to share information with families?

Download our “Mealtimes With Toddlers Family Handout” at: TeamNutrition.USDA.gov

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