

A Two Year Old's Diet

DIET FOR THE TODDLER

By **two years of age** children like to choose the type and amount of food they eat. Their appetites are often fairly small until they have a growth spurt at around five years. Toddlers may think one food is marvelous for a week or two and then totally reject it (even for a while eating green beans two or three times a day).

Children who used to like almost any exotic food may as toddlers refuse anything unusual. Afternoon snacks, even if small, may prevent eating at dinner. Even breakfast and lunch may need to be kept small if there is to be room for dinner meat and vegetables. Small helpings encourage a youngster to try a little of everything. It is a good idea to hold the milk, juice, fruit and dessert until you see how much of the first part of the meal is eaten.

Toddlers like to be independent and feed themselves, but some foods may seem hard to chew. It helps if meat and vegetables are cut into small, thin pieces. Avoid solid foods that could be swallowed whole and block the windpipe such as hot dogs, nuts (especially peanuts), hard candies, whole raw carrots or celery, and spoonfuls of peanut butter.

Children at this age often eat better when they are with other children. Many will get tired and cranky if they have to wait for a late family dinner. It may be better for them to eat by themselves at five o'clock and have a quiet time before bed.

Vegetables are important for their minerals and proteins, and we recommend at least two servings a day. Toddlers are old enough for most raw vegetables (except whole carrots and celery), and many prefer vegetables raw even when the rest of the family has them cooked. Raw vegetables are one exception to the toddler rule against between-meal snacks. Salads are interesting if there is a chance to try different flavors of salad dressing. A good rule of thumb is to offer a total of five vegetables and fruits over the course of a day (i.e. three vegetables and two fruits over a course of three meals and one or two snacks). The toddler may not touch any of them or eat all of them. It does not matter and you do not wage a battle over eating them. Over time their natural biological drives will ensure they eat what they need if it is put in front of them. This makes for a happier and less contentious meal time.

Starchy foods such as potatoes, rice, bread, noodles and macaroni, are also important in the diet. Cereals are more nutritious if they contain little or no sugar. Hot cakes, waffles, or French toast may be given, preferably with fresh fruit rather than syrup.

Meat, fish, or eggs should generally be served at least once a day. Avoid greasy fried foods, and try to serve red meat less than half the time.

Fruits are the best dessert. Oatmeal cookies, rice pudding, frozen yogurt, and graham crackers are examples of healthy alternative desserts. (See the above paragraph on **Vegetables** for discussion on amounts, frequency of giving and keeping meal time happy.)

Milk/Juice By two years old most children should have given up their bottles and should be drinking the same milk which others in the family use. Two to three 8 oz. glasses of milk a day is enough, and some children may prefer less. Juice is not needed every day and eighteen to 20 ounces a week is plenty. Sweetened drinks interfere with the appetite for more important foods and may contribute to anemia. Encourage thirsty children to drink water. Soda pop should be discouraged.

Supplements If the Toddler has a varied diet, vitamin supplements are not usually necessary. Occasionally, iron supplementation may be required if the child eats very little meat, iron-fortified cereal, and vegetables high in iron.

Friends. Toddlers often get food from a variety of sources. It helps if you have an understanding with neighbors and relatives regarding what you think is an appropriate diet for your child. Remember that candy was originally intended as an occasional special treat. Let your toddler help you think up interesting new ways to serve healthy foods - the resulting innovations may be fun and unusual! Don't be

alarmed if your child's appetite varies considerably from one day to another. Meal time should be a happy time, a time for discussing the joys of the day and looking forward to future pleasures.