

## **A balanced diet for a toddler**

The period of intense physical and mental development your child goes through as they advance from infant to toddler brings an increase in their cognitive abilities. As their muscles strengthen, their brain also prepares for the challenge of more developed activities like walking and talking. To ensure the healthiest growth and development, a balanced diet is essential.

### **Your toddler's diet is different from yours**

A balanced diet for a toddler is very different from an adult's. Their differing nutritional needs should be taken into account when planning family meals.

### **Sugar and salt**

Toddlers should have less than 2g of salt per day – 1/3 of an adult's maximum daily allowance. It's because of this that many adult foods are deemed unsuitable for toddlers. You're advised not to add salt to any food you prepare for your toddler.

The natural sugars found in fruit, vegetables, and milk are fine, but avoid foods with added sugar.

### **Portion sizes**

With a tummy that is at least 3 times smaller than yours, your toddler needs to eat little and often. Three small, balanced meals along with regular nutritious snacks will give them a steady stream of energy and nutrients throughout the day.

### **More fat, less fibre**

It's not just their portion sizes that should differ from yours; the balance of energy and nutrients within each meal should differ too. Your toddler needs a diet that is relatively high in fat and low in fibre – the opposite of the kind of diet the average adult needs. Although fibre is a good thing for us adults, too much of it may fill your toddler up and prevent them from getting the energy and nutrients they need.

### **Prebiotic oligosaccharides (prebiotics)**

Prebiotics feed the friendly bacteria found naturally in your toddler's tummy. Prebiotics are found in breastmilk, which is one of the reasons breastfeeding is considered best for babies. But they're also present in some foods and drinks, such as bananas, onions, tomatoes, chicory and some Growing Up milks. Including these foods in your toddler's diet will encourage their existing levels of friendly bacteria to thrive.

### **Milk and dairy**

Milk still plays an important role in your toddler's diet; they can have up to three 120ml servings of milk, or a combination of milk, cheese and yoghurt to get their three dairy servings. Aptamil Growing Up milk contains our unique prebiotic blend to support your toddler from the inside as part of a balanced diet. It provides 40 times more iron than the same amount of cows' milk, plus vitamins D and C – both essential to their healthy development.

### **A 'balanced' toddler diet**

A balanced diet for a toddler is made up of the same food groups needed by adults:

- Starchy foods such as bread (offer a mix of wholegrain and white) pancakes, savoury muffins, cereals and potatoes. Offer a portion at every meal, or as a snack.
- Fruit and vegetables – the more varied in colour the better as each colour vegetable tends to provide different nutrients. Aim to give them 5 toddler-sized portions a day by including fruit and vegetables at each meal and as snacks.  
Milk, cheese and yogurt and other calcium-rich dairy food. Your toddler should be having three portions of dairy food per day.  
Meat, fish and alternatives, eggs and pulses, which provide your toddler with essential iron, protein and omega-3 fats. They should have one to two servings a day. Vegetarians should have two to three servings and team it with a food or drink high in vitamin C to help them absorb the iron.
- Foods high in fat and sugar such as oils, butter, cakes and biscuits. Although they provide energy, they contain relatively small amounts of vitamins and minerals. So while these may be included in your toddler's diet, serve them as an extra or occasional treat and don't use them to replace one of the other food groups.

### **Food safety and foods to avoid**

While some foods simply need extra attention when preparing them, some are best avoided completely.

- Added salt should be avoided; check the salt content in pre-prepared food and avoid adding salt to home-cooked meals - use herbs and spices to season instead.
- Artificial flavourings, colourings, preservatives and sweeteners should also be avoided. Although they're not allowed to be added to manufactured baby foods, they can be present in some adult foods such as soft drinks and juices. Certain additives have been linked to behavioural problems in children, so it's always best to check the label.
- Eggs and shellfish can cause food poisoning if not cooked properly, so ensure they're well cooked.

### **Peanut allergies**

Peanuts are an excellent source of some nutrients but in previous years mums have been advised to avoid them to limit the risk of allergy. However, following a review by the government, it was felt that there is no clear evidence to suggest that eating or not eating peanuts influences the chance of your child developing an allergy. Consequently, the government has revised its advice:

- Now, even if you have a family history of allergies, pregnant and breastfeeding mums can eat nuts.
- It is safe to introduce peanuts to your child's weaning diet provided they are over the age of 6 months. Before this, nuts and all other potential allergens such as seeds, milk, eggs, wheat, fish or shellfish should be avoided. After 6 months, if you would like to introduce these foods, do so one at a time so that you can monitor any reaction.
- If your child has been diagnosed with an allergy (e.g. eczema, or an allergy to foods other than peanuts) or if there is a history of allergy in the family, it's not necessarily true that your child will develop a peanut allergy; however, they may be at higher risk, so you're advised to speak to your doctor before giving them peanuts for the first time.

Remember that all whole or chopped nuts should be avoided until 5 years as they are a choking hazard. However, ground nuts and nut butters are fine.

If you've got any questions, the chances are that our team of experts have been there themselves - give them a call on 08457 623 628 Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm. Or you can reach them on our one-to-one instant online messaging service, Live Chat 9am to 5pm.