

## TODDLER

# Toddler Portion Sizes by Age: Visual Guide + Printable Chart

Exact toddler portion sizes for ages 12–36 months by food group. Includes the 1 tablespoon rule, daily serving counts, and a printable chart to share with caregivers.

## Key Takeaways

- The classic toddler portion rule: 1 tablespoon of each food per year of age per serving (1 tbsp at age 1, 2 tbsp at age 2, 3 tbsp at age 3).
- Toddlers need approximately 1,000–1,400 calories per day depending on age, size, and activity level.
- Serve 3 meals and 2–3 snacks per day at consistent times to regulate hunger cues.
- A toddler's stomach is roughly the size of their clenched fist — use this as your visual reference.
- Day-to-day variation in appetite is normal; growth slowdown after the first birthday naturally reduces calorie demand.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How much should a 1-year-old eat at each meal?

At 12 months, offer 1 tablespoon of each food per serving as a starting amount. A typical meal plate might include 1–2 tbsp protein (shredded chicken), 1–2 tbsp vegetable (soft peas), and 1–2 tbsp grain (soft pasta). Let your toddler ask for more if still hungry — toddlers regulate intake well when not pressured.

### How much should a 2-year-old eat?

A 2-year-old needs approximately 1,000–1,200 calories per day across 3 meals and 2 snacks. Serve 2 tablespoons of each food as a starting portion. Typical daily intake includes 4–5 servings of grains, 2–3 servings of fruit, 2–3 servings of vegetables, 2 servings of protein, and 2 cups of dairy.

### How much milk should a toddler drink per day?

Ages 12–24 months: 16–24 oz of whole milk per day. Ages 2–3 years: 16–20 oz of low-fat or whole milk per day. Excess milk crowds out solid foods and increases iron deficiency risk. Serve milk at meals and limit between-meal milk drinks.

### Is my toddler eating enough?

Trust your toddler's hunger and fullness cues. A toddler eating well is: growing consistently on their growth curve, has energy to play, wets 4–6 diapers or uses the toilet regularly, and is developing normally. If you see consistent weight loss, extreme selectivity, or growth stalls, consult your pediatrician.

### **My toddler barely eats some days. Is this normal?**

Yes. Day-to-day variation in toddler appetite is entirely normal, driven by growth spurts, teething, illness, activity levels, and developmental leaps. The Division of Responsibility framework — where parents control what and when food is offered, and toddlers control whether and how much — handles this variation best.

### **How many vegetables should a toddler eat per day?**

The USDA recommends 1 cup of vegetables per day for a 1-year-old, increasing to 1–1.5 cups by age 3. In toddler servings, this equals 2–3 small servings of 1/4 cup (4 tablespoons) each. Vegetables do not need to be eaten in large amounts — variety across the week matters more than quantity at any one meal.

## **Sources**

1. Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020–2025: Birth to 24 Months — USDA and HHS
2. Toddler Nutrition — CDC
3. How to Feed Your Toddler — HealthyChildren.org — AAP
4. Feeding Toddlers: Ages 1–3 — KidsHealth (Nemours)
5. Recommended Dietary Allowances — Toddler Ages 1–3 — National Academies — Dietary Reference Intakes