



**Maternal & Family
Health Services**

15 Public Square, Suite 600,
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701
800.367.6347
mfhs.org

Nutrition for Three Year Olds

Three year olds have very specific food preferences. Some preferences may vary from day to day. They may ask for a certain food for several days in a row, and then insist that they don't like it anymore. Offer nutritious food choices at every meal and let your child make the decision of how much to eat. Your child may not eat the exact amounts suggested every day. Try to balance the amounts over a few days or week.

Your child should be eating the same nutritious foods as the rest of the family. This includes:

- Fresh vegetables and fruits
- Nonfat or low-fat dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheeses)
- Lean meats/protein (chicken, turkey, fish, lean hamburger)
- Whole grain cereals and bread

It is also important to limit the junk food and sugared beverages in your child's diet.

Simple guide for feeding your toddler:

- Each day, a child between ages 1 and 3 years needs about 40 calories for every inch of height. This means, for example, that a toddler who measures 32 inches should be taking in an average of about 1,300 calories a day, but the amount varies with each child's build and activity level.
- The child's serving size should be approximately one-quarter of an adult's.

Average toddler-sized meal:

- One ounce of meat, or 2 to 3 tablespoons of beans
- One to 2 tablespoons of vegetable
- One to 2 tablespoons of fruit
- One-quarter slice of bread



Avoid foods and beverages with added sugars and choose those with lower sodium. Experiment with flavors, colors, and textures to see what your child likes.

Example of a simple meal that includes a protein source, whole grain, fruit, vegetable, and dairy:
A turkey or peanut butter sandwich, a serving of carrots, an apple, and a glass of milk.

A simple lunch like this takes less time to prepare than driving through a fast-food restaurant—and it is much healthier!

Helpful Tips for Feeding your Three Year Old

- Offer very small amounts of a new food for your child to taste, along with other foods he or she already likes. Do not expect your child to eat a full portion of a new food and don't get discouraged if your child is unwilling to try new foods. It may take a child up to 10 or more tries to accept a new food.
- Turn off the TV—especially at mealtimes. Television advertising can be a big challenge to your three-year-old's good nutrition. Young children are easily influenced by ads for unhealthy foods like sugary cereals, fast food, and sweets.
- Offer different foods from all five food groups each day. Encourage your child to choose from a variety of foods.
- Serve foods in small portions at scheduled meals and snacks.
- Toddlers can easily fill up on beverages. Offer water if your child is thirsty in between meals.
- Toddlers use a lot of energy to grow and play, and their little stomachs can't hold enough food to keep them from getting hungry between meals. Many young children need both a morning and an afternoon snack. These should be timed so they will still be hungry for lunch and dinner.
- Snacks should include a balance of healthy foods. Children often come to think of a "snack" as a time to eat highly processed foods. You can help avoid this by serving freshly prepared foods to your children—even at snack time.