

Toddler/Preschool Nutrition

Q: Do you have tips on how to get toddlers to eat?

A: Here are some fun food ideas to get you through meal-time without tears...

Offering your child a few alternatives during toddlerhood – can make your life a whole lot easier. Children are experimenting with asking for what they want and developing a sense of taste as well. It can be very normal for toddlers to be finicky picky eaters! Platters are a great way to encourage choosing through various colours and textures and gives your toddler the ability to assert themselves (platters can include fruit, rice crackers, goat cheese, hummus and slices of toast with coconut oil or veggies and hummus, pretzels, cow cheese, and rolled up pieces of meat).

Let children get involved in cooking and learning to make healthy food choices at an early age. For older children, ask your child to help make a healthy menu plan for the week, and let them help with the shopping. Education is so important.

1. **Kids prefer their vegetables raw** in most cases, which is perfect since fresh raw fruits and veggies are full of valuable nutrients. Cut up a colourful array of vegetables along with a homemade dip, or cut up some fresh fruit and serve with a yogurt dip. Benefits: More nutrient and vitamins feeding the blood and supporting and strengthening digestion and the developing immune system
2. **Veggie dog sail boats** – Assemble cooked veggie dog in bun, stick a skewer in the center for the mast, thread a triangular shaped soy cheese slice that has been cut from corner to corner onto the skewer for a sail and top the mast with a cherry tomato. These are great for kid's birthday parties.
3. **Sandwich shapes** – Assemble sandwich as usual and then cut into shapes with large cookie cutters.
4. **Pancakes** – Experiment with whole grain flours or a combination. One of my favourites is whole oat or rice flour, rye flour, and barley with a little orange zest added for extra flavour. Serve with berries and real maple syrup. Make a batch and freeze them – then pop them in the toaster for a quick snack or breakfast.
5. **Pizza** – Let each family member make his or her own. Get all the toppings ready: pita bread, sauce, peppers, onions, mushrooms, zucchini, tomatoes, grated cheese, veggie pepperoni, and then let the fun begin. Let everyone personalize their pizza with a funny face or shape made from veggies. Put under the broiler until cheese is golden and bubbly and enjoy!
6. **Smoothies** – for toddlers on the run. Toss into the blender, some soft tofu for protein or a scoop of protein powder, milk (soy or cow's), pineapple juice, and few berries, ½ banana, and a tablespoon of flax seed oil to boost the immune system. Great for breakfast. Make a batch the night before to save time in the morning.
7. **Muffins** – using whole grains, nuts, seeds and dried fruit make great snacks or a quick breakfast along with a glass of milk. Avoid sugar, and use maple syrup, honey, or molasses instead.
8. **Jello** – Mix 1 tbsp agar-agar (A gelling agent made from red saltwater algae) with 3 ½ cups fruit juice and simmer for 15 minutes. Pour into mold with fresh fruit/berries and refrigerate.
9. **Nut butters** – as long as your child is not allergic, are great sources of protein, good carbs and fats. Try almond butter, cashew butter, and sunflower seed butter for a change. Nut butters contain the essential fatty acids omega-3 and omega-6, which are important for brain development, healthy immune system, and healthy skin. Caution! Peanuts are highly allergenic so talk to your Health Care Provider about the best time to introduce tree nuts.
10. **Toddler Finger Foods** – Kamut puffs and rice puffs available at Zehrs and yummy easy snacks! Choose O's over Cheerios which are made from a different flour and be sure to rotate your grains every once in a while to avoid food sensitivities.

11. **Avocado** – is a wonderful fatty food that is healthy for growing bodies and glowing skin admist the sand from the sandbox of course!
12. **Quesadillas** – Everyone loves these. Saute chicken or firm tofu cut into thin strips, and sauté a variety of coloured peppers, and a large onion cut into strips. Assemble chicken or tofu on soft tortillas, sprinkle with grated cheese, roll up and bake in 350° oven for 10 minutes. Serve with sour cream and salsa. These are a huge hit at my house.
13. **Ice Cream** – Peel a number of very ripe bananas. Break into one-inch pieces and freeze in a zip lock bag. Just before serving, run through a juicer or blender with a small amount of liquid (water or juice). Serve immediately. Add carob powder or berries to blender for different flavours or top with fruit.