

TODDLER

Toddler Feeding Schedule by Age: How Often & How Much (12–36 Months)

Complete toddler feeding schedules for ages 12–36 months. Sample daily routines, meal timing, snack frequency, and milk transition guidance from AAP and CDC.

Key Takeaways

- Toddlers thrive on 3 meals and 2–3 snacks per day at consistent times — predictable timing regulates hunger cues.
- Space meals and snacks 2–3 hours apart; toddlers need reliable hunger between eating occasions to eat well.
- Milk at meals only (not between meals) prevents milk from blunting appetite and displacing iron-rich foods.
- The sample schedules below adapt from the quieter 12-month routine to the more active, 2-nap-free 3-year-old routine.
- Grazing (continuous snacking) is the most common cause of toddler appetite and behaviour issues at mealtimes.

Frequently Asked Questions

How many times a day should a toddler eat?

Toddlers should eat 3 meals and 2–3 snacks per day, spaced 2–3 hours apart. This gives enough time for genuine hunger to develop between eating occasions, which motivates toddlers to eat at mealtimes. More than 3 snacks per day is associated with poor appetite at meals.

What time should a toddler eat breakfast?

Breakfast within 30–60 minutes of waking works best for most toddlers. Waiting too long after waking leads to over-hunger, which makes toddlers difficult to settle at the table. A 7:00–8:00 am breakfast suits most toddlers who wake between 6:30–7:30 am.

Should toddlers have milk at every meal?

Milk at meals is fine — 4–6 oz (120–180 ml) alongside food. The key is to avoid offering milk between meals as a snack or pacifier drink. Between-meal milk fills the stomach without hunger-triggering foods, which reduces appetite at the next meal and creates a cycle of poor eating.

When should a 2-year-old nap and how does it affect meals?

Most 2-year-olds still nap once per day, usually 12:30–3:00 pm. Schedule lunch before the nap (around noon) and afternoon snack after waking. This prevents the nap interfering with meal timing and ensures your toddler is neither hungry nor overly full at each eating occasion.

How long should a toddler meal last?

Aim for 20–30 minutes per meal. Longer than 30 minutes often indicates your toddler is not hungry or is playing rather than eating. Remove the plate after 30 minutes without pressure or comment — the next eating opportunity is only 2–3 hours away.

What do I do if my toddler refuses a meal entirely?

Offer the next scheduled snack or meal without offering alternatives from the refused meal. Toddlers who learn that refusing a meal earns a preferred food immediately after will refuse meals strategically. Trust that no healthy toddler will harm themselves by skipping one meal — the next opportunity comes soon.

Sources

1. Feeding and Nutrition for Toddlers — [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org) — AAP
2. Toddler Nutrition — Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
3. Division of Responsibility in Feeding — Ellyn Satter Institute
4. Feeding Young Children: Learning to Eat — KidsHealth — Nemours
5. Nutritional Needs of Toddlers — National Academies Press