

TODDLER

Toddler Hydration Guide: How Much Water, Milk & Juice for Ages 1–3

Complete toddler hydration guide for ages 1–3. Daily water and milk targets, juice limits, signs of dehydration, and best drinks for toddlers by age.

Key Takeaways

- Toddlers aged 1–3 need approximately 1.3 litres (44 oz) of total fluid per day from all sources including food.
- Water is the best drink for toddlers between meals — offer freely throughout the day.
- Whole milk (16–24 oz per day) is appropriate from 12–24 months; switch to low-fat milk at age 2.
- Juice should be limited to 4 oz of 100% fruit juice per day — and is not necessary at all.
- Never offer sweet drinks (cordials, soft drinks, sports drinks) to toddlers — they establish harmful sugar preferences.

Frequently Asked Questions

How much water should a 1-year-old drink per day?

The Adequate Intake (AI) for total fluid at age 1–3 is approximately 1.3 litres (44 oz) per day from all sources — including water in food. As a practical guide, offer water freely throughout the day in a cup. Most toddlers regulate their thirst well. In hot weather or after active play, increase water availability.

When can toddlers drink water?

Toddlers can drink water freely from 6 months onward (small amounts alongside solids). From 12 months, water becomes the main drink between meals. Offer water in a sippy cup or open cup at every meal and throughout the day. There is no upper limit for water in toddlers — unlike some nutrients, excess water is managed well by healthy toddler kidneys.

Should toddlers drink 100% fruit juice?

The AAP recommends limiting 100% fruit juice to a maximum of 4 oz (120 ml) per day for ages 1–3, and recommends water as the better choice. Juice removes the fibre from whole fruit while concentrating the sugars, contributing to dental caries and potentially reducing appetite for more nutritious foods. Whole fruit is always preferable to juice.

Can toddlers drink plant-based milk (oat, almond, soy)?

From 12 months, cow's milk is the primary recommended dairy drink. Plant milks can be used in cooking. Soy milk is the most nutritionally comparable to cow's milk and may replace cow's milk for vegan toddlers when fortified with calcium, vitamin D, and iodine. Oat and almond milks are not nutritionally adequate as a cow's milk replacement without extensive fortification.

What are signs of dehydration in a toddler?

Signs of dehydration in toddlers include: fewer than 4 wet diapers per day (or infrequent toilet trips for a potty-trained toddler), dark yellow urine, dry lips and mouth, sunken eyes, no tears when crying, unusual lethargy or irritability, and reduced activity. Severe dehydration (sunken fontanelle, very dark urine, no wet diaper for 8+ hours) is a medical emergency.

Can toddlers drink sports drinks?

No. Sports drinks are not appropriate for toddlers. They contain high levels of added sugar and sodium, and are designed for prolonged athletic activity in adults — not the hydration needs of toddlers. Even for very active toddlers or those recovering from mild illness, water or diluted oral rehydration solution is appropriate.

Sources

1. Juice in Early Childhood — HealthyChildren.org — AAP
2. Recommended Water Intake for Toddlers — CDC
3. Dietary Reference Intakes for Water — National Academies — Institute of Medicine
4. Sugary Drinks and Child Health — American Heart Association
5. Dehydration in Children — NHS