



# Feeding Toddlers and Preschoolers (1 to 5 years)

## HOW TO FEED

Young children are usually good judges of how much food they need. To encourage healthy eating follow a division of responsibility for feeding your child:

**CAREGIVERS** are responsible for **WHEN**, **WHERE**, and **WHAT** foods are offered.

**CHILDREN** are responsible for **WHETHER** and **HOW MUCH** they eat.

<b>CAREGIVER RESPONSIBILITIES</b>	WHEN	Offer meals and snacks at about the same time every day. Children need to feel secure that food will be available to them in a predictable way.
	WHERE	Offer meals and snacks at a table or other feeding location. Set up the feeding environment to be free of televisions, toys, and other distractions so that children may pay attention to eating and when their bodies tell them when they're full.
	WHAT	Offer a variety of nutrient-dense foods. Offer the same foods to everyone at the table. If a new food is being offered, offer it alongside a familiar food that is liked (e.g., bread, apple, cheese). When asking children for help deciding what to offer, give choices and make sure they're nutritionally similar (e.g., carrot sticks or orange slices instead of carrot sticks or cookies).
<b>CHILD RESPONSIBILITIES</b>	WHETHER	It is normal for children's appetites and food preferences to vary. Let children decide whether they want to eat all, some, or none of the foods offered. Never coerce, pressure, bribe, or reward children to get them to eat. Don't tell children you will be happy or angry because of what they choose to eat. These external signals to start and stop eating may cause children to ignore their own hunger and fullness signals and may lead to overeating.
	HOW MUCH	As soon as children are able, let them serve themselves. Help children take small portions and let them know that they may have more if they are still hungry. Let children eat as much as they need. It is normal for children to eat more some days than others.

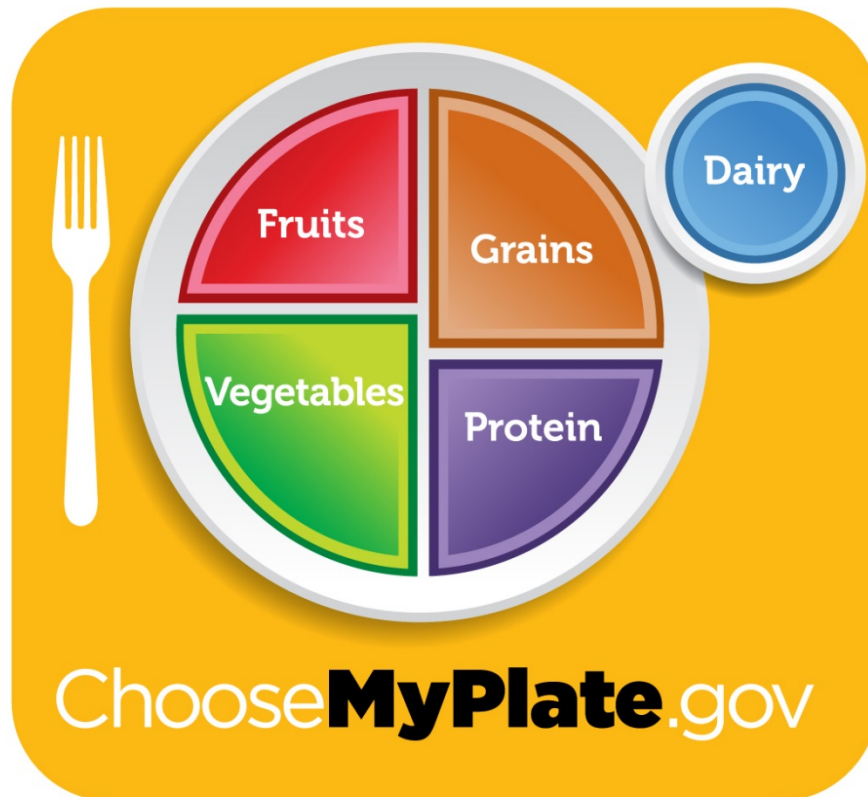
For more information visit us at <https://5210.psu.edu> or email at [5210@psu.edu](mailto:5210@psu.edu).

Adapted from:

Satter, E. (2014). *Ellyn Satter's division of responsibility in feeding*. Retrieved from: <http://ellynsatterinstitute.org/dor/divisionofresponsibilityinfeeding.php>

## WHAT TO FEED

Young children should eat a variety of nutrient-dense foods.  
The USDA's food guidance system, *MyPlate*, shows what a healthy variety looks like:



- Keep your child's overall diet in mind. Children may not eat a variety of food groups at a single meal. They are more likely to eat a variety of food groups over the course of a day.
- Offer a variety of nutrient-dense foods in the different food groups. Minimize added sweeteners, salt, and solid fats. Be aware that small, round foods such as whole grapes and cherry tomatoes, and foods that are especially gummy or difficult to chew may increase the risk of choking – cut foods into pieces no larger than ½ inch.
- It may take up to 10-15 exposures to a new food before a child accepts it – keep trying! An exposure may include looking at a food, smelling it, touching it, licking it, or spitting it out. These are all normal behaviors. Vegetables, in particular, may not be accepted at first because they can be bitter or have strong flavors. Some children prefer raw vegetables instead of cooked vegetables, or may be willing to try a vegetable if it is offered with dip.

For more information visit us at <https://5210.psu.edu> or email at [5210@psu.edu](mailto:5210@psu.edu).

#### References:

- Birch, L. L. & Marlin, D. W. (1982). I don't like it; I never tried it: Effects of exposure on two-year-old children's food preferences. *Appetite*, 3(4), 353-360.
- Satter, E. (1995). Feeding dynamics: Helping children to eat well. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, 9(4), 178-184.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). *ChooseMyPlate.gov*. Retrieved from <http://choosemyplate.gov>