

Young children tend to like less spicy, bland food, although this is a culturally determined preference. Substitutions can be provided for foods that they do not enjoy, although parents need not cater to all of their desires. Frequent nutritious snacks can replace a meal.

Grazing (i.e., nibbling and snacking) is a good way to ensure proper nutrition, provided that appropriate foods are offered.

To determine serving size for young children, use the following guidelines:

- A general guide to serving sizes for toddlers is 1 tablespoon of solid food per year of age, or one fourth to one third of the adult portion size.
- Use the tablespoon guide for easily measured foods, such as vegetables or rice.
- Use the fraction guide for bread or milk.

Mastication skills continue to mature, putting children at risk for choking; therefore, large round foods (e.g., hot dogs, grapes, peas, carrots, popcorn, and fruit gel snacks) should be avoided until the child is able to chew them effectively. Active play while eating should be discouraged to prevent choking. Appetite and food preferences are sporadic. Often the interest in food parallels a growth spurt; thus periods of good eating are interspersed with phases of poor eating. If exposed to the same food every day, a young toddler does not learn how to manage the complex sensory information needed to eat new, more difficult foods (e.g., vegetables with a different texture vs. pureed, slippery fruits). To help prevent “food jags,” it is recommended that parents present food in various physical forms. The child may need to progress to eating new foods in a stepwise fashion such as visually tolerating the food, interacting with the food, smelling the food, touching the food, tasting the food, and then eating the food.

Many authorities consider this period of picky eating to be a developmental phase and growth charts can be used to demonstrate growth to parents who are often concerned ([Parks, Shaikhkhalil, Groleau, et al, 2016](#)). Parents should be encouraged to plan a nutritionally balanced week instead of day because of the way toddlers restrict food intake in their effort to exert control over their environment ([Schwartz and Benuck, 2013](#)).