

# Plant-Based Toddlers: Age 12 Months to 3 Years

Evidence-based advice from Amanda Benham, vegan paediatric dietitian with over 25 years experience

## From age 12 months:

- By now most children should be in a routine with eating three meals per day and be included in family mealtimes. Keep offering a range of foods from the plant food groups every day: Grain (e.g. oats, wheat, rice), legumes and soy products (e.g. tofu, tempeh, lentils), green vegetables, other colourful vegetables, fresh fruit, nut and seed pastes and calcium-fortified full-fat soymilk.
- Keep offering iron-rich foods (e.g. legumes, soy products) with a source of vitamin C at every meal (e.g. fruit with breakfast and add raw tomato or lemon/juice to meals.) Use iodised salt.
- Offer a nutritious snack between meals. Good snack choices include crackers, thin vegetable sticks (once your child can bite and chew them safely) with hummus or nut butter, fresh fruit (in moderation). Avoid giving snack foods that are high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Give a full-fat calcium-fortified soymilk in a baby cup (not a bottle). E.g. give with the morning and afternoon snack, aiming for about 1-1.5 cups per day in total. Keep also offering water in a cup between meals.
- If previously giving infant formula, it can be ceased at 12 months and baby bottles should no longer be used. Food should be offered *before* breastmilk at meal and snack times.
- Continue to supplement your toddler daily with vitamin B12 (5+ mcg per day), DHA (100mg per day) and vitamin D (600-1500 IU per day), especially on days when your child is not getting sun on bare arms or legs (1). Give two serves of omega-3 rich foods per day, where one serve = 1 tsp flaxseed oil, 3 tsp ground flaxseeds or 4 tsp chia seeds (1).
- Suggested meal pattern for your toddler's meals: Breakfast: Cereal + fruit + fortified soymilk + flax or chia seeds; Lunch: Grain (or potato) + legume/tofu/tempeh + green vegetable + other colourful vegetables + vitamin C source +/- high fat food (tahini, nut butter or avocado). Dinner: Same pattern as lunch. Offer a morning and afternoon snack.
- Continue to have your child's growth and development monitored by a health professional.



## Tips to prevent "fussy eating":

- Keep offering a wide variety of healthy meals and snacks, including foods that have been refused previously. (It can take 10 or more offerings before a child will eat a food). If your child refuses to eat at mealtime, don't stress or fuss. Just put their meal aside for when they are hungrier rather than offering an alternative meal. This helps them learn to eat family meals rather than expect something different.
- Remember that it is not the parents' job to "get food into" the child, but simply to offer it. Practise the ESI Division of Responsibility in Feeding (2), which states that the caregivers' role (not the child's) is to decide **what** food is offered, **where** it is offered and **when** it is offered. It is the child's job to decide whether they will eat and how much. Young children will not starve themselves, but if they know they will be offered a preferred food if they refuse a meal, they will make use of this information and become "fussy eaters". Offer your child 3 meals and 2 snacks per day and do not let them "graze", as this will make the less likely to eat their meals. Allow them unlimited access to only water at other times.
- Encourage your child to eat and try new foods but never try to coerce them. Do not talk about their food likes and dislikes with them or in front of them. It is not the parents' job to find out what the child likes to eat; it is to help the child learn to enjoy a wide range of healthy foods. Model good eating habits and make mealtimes pleasant.

References: (1) Baroni L, Goggi S, Battaglini R, Berveglieri M, Fasan I, Filippin D, et al. Vegan Nutrition for Mothers and Children: Practical Tools for Healthcare Providers. *Nutrients*. 2018;11(1):5. <https://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/11/1/5/html>, accessed 1/1/19.

(2) Satter E. Elynn Satter's Division of Responsibility in Feeding. 2016 <https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/handout-dor-tasks-cap-2016.pdf>, accessed 1/1/19. (a useful resource for parents)

The information here is of general nature and is not intended to replace individualised dietary advice from an Accredited Practising Dietitian.  
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