


Good food for children *between one and two years*



Livsmedelsverket
Swedish Food Agency





When your child turns one, he or she can, generally speaking, eat the same food as the rest of the family. The eating habits that follow along later into life are established here. This advice can help you along the road to good habits. It is based on collected research and on proven experience, and is written to suit most families. Not all the advice will work for everyone, but it can be adapted to your family's situation.

Good Food for Small Children

Children need nourishment to grow and develop. Since small children don't eat as much as adults, they need food rich in vitamins and minerals. At the same time, it's not what your child eats at individual mealtimes or on a given day that matters, but what they eat over the longer term. The goal, then, is not to try to make every mealtime perfect, but on the whole to offer good food.

What's good for children is also good for the rest of the family. Since children themselves don't know what is good for them, you as parents need to lead the way. A good rule is that you decide what to serve while your child decides how much he or she will eat.

What should children eat?

For children, just like adults, eating a variety – that is, many different types of food – is good. Your child then gets the nutrition he or she needs – proteins, carbohydrates, fats, and various vitamins and minerals.

By serving different types of food, you also help the child get used to many flavours. Many children are sceptical of new food and may need to try new foodstuffs several times to get used to the new taste. It may be easier to take in a new flavour if it's served alongside food your child already likes.

Even if eating a variety is good, it's not a big deal if your child eats the same food for a week. They won't be malnourished because of it. What you can do instead is try varying the side dishes and snacks. If your child only eats a few dishes over a longer period, their diet can become too unbalanced. Talk with a nurse at the Child Health Centre (BVC) about what you can do.

Your body benefits from getting food regularly – breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and 2-3 snacks. It is also easier for your child to learn the difference between being hungry and being full. Avoid snacking between meals so that your child manages to eat properly at mealtimes. Nor is it good for their teeth to always have something in their mouths.

Breakfast and snacks

A good, nutritious breakfast can, for example, consist of one or more of these:

- sour milk or yoghurt with muesli or unsweetened cereal
- porridge with milk
- sandwich
- a mug of gruel
- and preferably a piece of fruit or vegetable.

In many cultures, people eat the leftovers from dinner for breakfast, and that of course is also good.

Since small children don't manage to eat as much at every mealtime, snacks are more important for children than they are for adults. A nutritious snack can consist of the same types of food as breakfast. If you continue to breastfeed, breast milk is also a good little snack that provides many nutrients, such as omega-3 fats.



Children learn a lot by imitating. Therefore, taste all the food yourself and show that you think it is good!



Buns, cookies, ice cream and other sweet products don't provide as much nutrition, but contain a lot of sugar. It's a good idea to save them for special occasions.

Whole grains and fibre

Whole grains and fibre are good, even for small children, but children under two years can get loose stool if they get too much. For other children it can be the op-posite – they can become constipated. How much fibre children can eat without affecting the stomach varies from child to child – experiment with it. A good way of getting just enough fibre is varying between wholegrain products and types less rich in fibre.



Lunch and dinner

With cooked food for both lunch and dinner, it's easier to cover a small child's need for nutrition. A rule of thumb to make sure of this is to serve something from each food group every day:

- Potatoes, pasta, rice, bulgur, couscous, and bread: provide carbohydrates and fibre, but also important vitamins and minerals like iron and folic acid (vitamin B9).
- Meat, fish, chicken, eggs, beans, lentils, and tofu: important sources of protein, vitamins, and minerals. Meat, beans, and tofu are good sources of iron.
- Vegetables, root vegetables, fruit, and berries: contain many vitamins and other protective substances, as well as fibre.
- Milk, sour milk, yoghurt, and vegetable-based drinks like enriched oat and soy drinks: important sources of calcium and many other vitamins and minerals.
- Oils and liquid margarine for cooking: important sources of beneficial fats. If the food is low in fat, your child may need a little extra fat in his or her portion.

Get your child used to drinking water or milk with food. Use cold water and run the water until it is cold, even when using it for cooking. Warm water from the tap can contain copper from the pipes.

IF YOU HAVE YOUR OWN WELL, you should test the water quality every three years. The municipal environmental department where you live can advise you how to do it. If the water is "unfit" due to bacteria, or if E. coli bacteria is found in the water, it should be boiled before it is given to children. For other substances, the recommendations accompanying the analysis should be followed.

Read more about drinking water and wells at www.livsmedelsverket.se.

Home-made or store-bought?

Many people think it's fun to cook, while others aren't as accustomed to it. Cooking good food for small children doesn't need to be difficult. There are many recipes on the web and in cookbooks that you can get help from. There are also a number of semi-prepared and prepared dishes that are suitable even for small children.

Some people are suspicious of industrially prepared food, since it sometimes contains more additives than home-made. It's good to know that all the additives used in foodstuffs are scientifically evaluated and approved, and safe for both children and adults. On the other hand, you may need to be careful that the products don't contain a lot of salt or sugar. Choose food with the 'Keyhole' nutritional label – it contains less salt and sugar.

Fish and shellfish

Fish and shellfish are important sources of vitamin D, iodine, and selenium. Fatty fish like salmon, herring, and mackerel also contain the special omega-3 fat DHA, which children need for their brains and vision to develop. It's therefore a good idea for children to eat fish often, preferably 2-3 times a week. Try to vary among different kinds of fish; this is good for both health and the environment. A few types of fish may contain environmental pollutants; read more about this on page 17.

Many people think it's difficult to cook fish, but this doesn't need to be – one simple way is to cook a piece of fish in the microwave for a few minutes. There are also many good semi-prepared and prepared dishes to use. Fish on a sandwich, like canned mackerel, is another simple way to serve fish.

Children who never eat fish should have their food prepared with rapeseed oil and margarine made with rapeseed oil. This contains omega-3 fats that can be converted to DHA in the body, to some extent.

IRON is a nutrient that can be difficult for small children to get enough of. Iron-enriched porridge or gruel is therefore good, even during your child's second year of life. Meat, blood pudding, blood bread, and other blood dishes are also rich in iron. Beans, chickpeas, lentils, tofu, and a range of nuts and seeds are vegetarian sources.



It's good for children to eat fish, preferably 2-3 times a week.

A serving of sweetcorn or green peas during cooking can be a great way to counteract some of the hunger pangs.



Fruit and greens

Many children gladly eat fruit and vegetables if given the chance. But there are many children who don't eat enough fruit and greens. Serve vegetables at both lunch and dinner, and fruit every day. Vary the colour and form; this can arouse your child's curiosity in and pleasure from food.

Many vegetables come frozen. They contain just as many nutrients as fresh vegetables and can be cooked quickly. If you put them in the microwave, more nutrients are retained than if they were boiled. The packaging shows how it should be done. Beans and lentils contain substances that can cause stomach-ache, but these disappear if the beans are cooked. Read the packaging for how it should be done. Even fresh beans should be cooked. There are also beans and lentils in cans or Tetrapaks that are ready-made and can be served immediately.

A few more examples:

- Serve green peas, corn kernels or broccoli florets while you're cooking. This can be done quickly and can help keep down whining from hunger.
- Put vegetables in the food – for example shredded carrots, cabbage, a can of crushed tomatoes, corn, or beans in a meat sauce or stew.
- Small children often think 'boats' made from apple or pear slices are fun, as are banana slices. These are also easier for a small child to eat.

Read more in the section on vegetarian food for children.

Milk and dairy products

Milk and dairy products are important sources of calcium and other nutrients. Calcium is necessary to build your child's skeleton and teeth. A half-litre of milk, sour milk, or yoghurt per day is enough to cover your child's calcium needs. Gruel also contains calcium, but not as much as milk. A slice of cheese provides as much calcium as ½-1 dl of milk.

Many milk products and plant-based alternatives are fortified with extra vitamin D. Always choose fortified milk, yogurt, or plant-based drinks for your child. Vitamin D is essential for absorbing calcium from food.

If your child eats no dairy products at all, for example owing to milk protein allergies, you should get advice from a dietician.

WHICH MILK SHOULD SMALL CHILDREN DRINK? Children under two years need somewhat more fat in their foods than adults. It may feel natural to give children fatty dairy products. But it is primarily omega-3 fats, which are not found in milk, that children need more of. Therefore it's better to give low-fat dairy products and put a little extra rapeseed oil into the food instead, since it contains omega-3. Low-fat milk contains just as many vitamins and minerals as whole milk.

Butter, margarine, and oil

Omega-3 fats are important for children's development. Rapeseed oil is naturally rich in omega-3. A simple way for your child to get omega-3 is by choosing rapeseed oil and edible fats that contain rapeseed oil for your child's sandwiches and when cooking. Children under two years also need a little more fat than adults, so margarine with more fat is better than light margarine. Butter has only a little omega-3, and is therefore not the best choice for children. If you still choose to give your child butter, it is very important to use rapeseed oil for cooking and that the child eats fatty fish, which provide omega-3. Children who breastfeed also get omega-3 from breast milk.

How much should small children eat?

It's natural for children not to continue increasing their serving portions at the same rate as during their first year of life, since they don't grow as quickly as previously. If you, as a parent, let the child take responsibility for the amounts, the child will most often eat enough food over the long term. Don't serve portions that are too large; let your child take another helping of food. Sometimes your child only eats a little and quickly becomes hungry again. Sometimes he or she will eat a lot and become quite full. Your child needs to learn how much food is enough.

Do children need extra vitamins and minerals?

Children need vitamins and minerals to grow and develop, but it's better to get them from food than from supplements. Many people still want to give their children extra vitamins and minerals, for safety's sake. But small children can get too much of certain substances if they are given a supplement, which can cause greater damage than if they got too little.

Don't give your child any other supplements besides D drops without first consulting with a nurse at the Child Health Centre.



Don't forget the D drops!

D drops

Small children don't get enough vitamin D from their food. Too little vitamin D prevents your child's skeleton from developing properly. You therefore need to continue giving D drops every day until your child is two years old.

Some children need D drops even after turning two. This applies to

- children who don't go outdoors often or who, even in the summer, wear clothing that covers their face, arms, and legs when they are outdoors
- children who don't get food enriched with vitamin D, for example dairy products, cooking fats and sandwich spreads. Read the packaging.
- children who don't eat fish.

Continue the D drops if the child meets any of the above criteria. If in doubt, it is better to continue than to stop.

Vegetarian food

More and more, people are choosing to eat vegetarian food more often. This is good for their health and the environment. It's therefore good if your child learns to like vegetarian dishes early on. Many people vary and eat vegetarian food only occasionally; others avoid only meat, while others avoid all food from animals. Avoiding meat usually is not a problem whatsoever.

If you eat vegan foods and avoid meat, fish, milk, and eggs, you will need to learn a lot in order to develop a diet that gives your child all the nutrition he or she needs. For example, children on a vegan diet need to get vitamin B12 and vitamin D from supplements or fortified foods. If you choose to give your child vegan food, you should consult with a nurse at the Child Health Centre.

Regardless of what type of vegetarian food you eat, it's important not just to avoid food from animals but to replace them with nutritious vegetarian food.

If your child mostly gets vegetarian food, they should get things like the following on a daily basis:

- legumes like beans, peas, lentils, tofu, or other soy products
- wholegrain products
- vegetables and fruit
- skim milk, low-fat milk, or enriched grain milks (but no rice drinks, see page 19)
- rapeseed oil and sandwich spreads containing rapeseed.





There is plenty of fibre in vegetarian food. Fibre is very filling, and for children there is a risk that too much fibre will make them full before they've gotten enough energy and nutrition. It is therefore very important to pay attention to whether small vegetarians are growing as they should.

If your child gets lacto-vegetarian food, it will be easy to eat too much saturated fat if many dishes are made with milk and cheese – gratins, for example. It is therefore important to choose light dairy products for children who eat lacto-vegetarian food.

Children who are given vegan food must get vitamin B12 and D vitamins from supplements or enriched products.

There is more concrete advice at www.livsmedelsverket.se on how you can make good vegetarian or vegan food for small children.

Allergies

If you suspect an allergy

If you think your child can't tolerate a food, it's important not to start eliminating foods by yourself. That can make a correct diagnosis harder. Always consult first with the staff at the Child Health Centre. There can be other explanations for your child having stomach trouble, breaking out in a rash, or reacting in another way.

If your child is allergic

The most common allergies for small children are allergies to milk proteins and egg proteins. If your child is allergic, getting special advice from your dietician is important.

There is more information on coeliac disease, food allergies and hypersensitivity at www.livsmedelsverket.se.



To keep in mind in the kitchen

Small children are sensitive to bacteria and viruses that can cause food poisoning. Good hygiene is therefore important when preparing food with or for your child.

Washing your hands before you start cooking is important, of course, as well as immediately after handling raw meat and chicken. Wash cutting boards and kitchen equipment carefully after cutting meat and chicken. It's also a good idea to rinse off vegetables, especially leafy ones.

Raw meat can contain harmful bacteria, like EHEC. Don't let your child taste raw minced meat or raw meat. Cook minced meat and chicken thoroughly.

If you are going to save leftovers, put it in the refrigerator or freezer as soon as possible. If the food sits out at room temperature for more than a couple of hours, bacteria can start to grow. Small amounts of warm or lukewarm food can be put into the refrigerator immediately..

Don't eat burned food

When food is burned, harmful substances that aren't good for either children or adults are formed. Cut off the burnt part, or throw the food out if it is badly burned. It's also good to let the food be a light golden colour instead of golden brown when cooking.

Is there anything small children shouldn't eat?

Many parents are worried that the food their children eat contain harmful substances. Children's greater sensitivity to certain substances is taken into consideration when setting limits on how much pesticide can remain on fruits and vegetables, for example, or when approving additives. You don't need to worry about these kind of substances. There are other substances that unintentionally end up in the food, for example, environmental contaminants. A good way of reducing the risk of taking in too much of a harmful substance is to eat a varied diet, in other words, to eat different types of food. This applies to both children and adults.

Almost all food is good to eat, even for children, but some things should be avoided:

Fish that may contain environmental pollutants

Most fish can be eaten frequently, but there are a few kinds that may contain large amounts of environmental pollutants. These are:

- herring from the Baltic
- wild (not farmed) salmon and trout from the Baltic Sea, the Gulf of Bothnia and its rivers, Lake Vänern and Lake Vättern
- whitefish from Lake Vänern
- brook trout from Lake Vättern
- eel.

These fish contain so much dioxin and PCBs that girls, women of child-bearing age, and boys under the age of 18 should not eat them more than two to three times a year.

Wild salmon, trout, and brook trout are seldom available in stores. Salmon for sale is almost always farmed.

Children that eat a lot of home-caught fish

Bass, pike, pike perch, and burbot may contain mercury. Children that eat these kind of fish more than once a week may ingest amounts that can be harmful over the long term. It's therefore a good idea to vary them with other kinds of fish. Even fresh or frozen tuna, large Atlantic halibut, swordfish, shark, and rays may contain mercury.

Health foods

Health food products, like plant extracts and other herbs, are rarely scientifically tested. Nor are they tested on children, and it's therefore not possible to know if they are harmful or not. In promotional materials it's often claimed they have beneficial health effects, but they may be completely unsuitable for children who are growing and developing. You should therefore not give your child health food products..

Coffee, black tea, and energy drinks

Small children should not be given coffee or large amounts of black tea and cola drinks, since they contain caffeine. Children are more sensitive to caffeine than adults and can react with rapid heartbeat and nausea, for example. Energy drinks may contain a lot of caffeine and should not be given to children at all.

Cadmium in certain foods

Children should not eat kidney or liver as they can contain high amounts of cadmium, but liver pate or dishes with smaller amounts of liver are fine. Children should also not eat brown crab meat, known as crab butter, and snowball and king mushrooms that grow wild.

Cinnamon

Children should not eat more than half a teaspoon of cinnamon a day. But there is no harm in occasionally eating more cinnamon than this. Regularly eating large quantities of cinnamon can damage the liver.

Unpasteurised milk

Unpasteurised milk may contain harmful bacteria, like EHEC or campylobacter. Neither children nor adults should drink it. This also applies to curd cheese made with unpasteurised milk. This cheese is seldom available in stores, but can be found at local cheese producers. EHEC is a 'new' bacterium that began spreading in Sweden in the 1990s, and which can cause severe kidney damage in small children. Un-pasteurised milk cannot be sold in stores, but can be gotten at farms.

Rice cakes and rice drinks

Rice cakes and vegetable-based drinks made of rice contain arsenic. Children who regularly eat rice cakes and drink rice drinks, can ingest amounts that can be damaging to their health in the long run. Small children are more sensitive than older children, and therefore rice cakes and rice drinks should not be given to children under six years of age.

Porridge and gruel made from rice can also contain arsenic. Therefore, do not serve rice porridge and rice gruel exclusively. Instead, vary them with other types and brands. For instance, for gluten-intolerant children, you could alternate with corn-based products. In total, children should not eat rice products – rice, rice porridge, rice noodles and rice snacks – more than four times a week.

Salt

Keep being careful with salt, even after your child turns one year old. Too much salt can affect the blood pressure, even in children, and increase the risk of high blood pressure later in life. One way of reducing salt is by choosing products – for example break-fast cereals, bread, and cheese – with the Keyhole symbol. They contain less salt than brands that do not have the Keyhole symbol. Also avoid snacks like chips and cheese puffs, since they are often quite salty.

Choose iodized salt, but don't use too much of it. Iodine is needed to regulate metabolism, and iodized salt is an important source for both children and adults. The packaging indicates whether the salt contains iodine.





Watch out for the hidden sugar traps - instead, get your child used to flavors that are not so sweet. On the left of the picture you can see how much added sugar fruit yogurts, juices, drinking chocolate and creams contain.

Sugar, candy, drink mixes, and soft drinks

Avoid candy, drink mixes, and soft drinks for as long as possible. They contain few nutrients but a lot of sugar, which children don't need. Too much sugar can damage children's teeth. Your child may not manage to eat enough regular food, or become overweight over the long term.

Many people don't think about the fact that many foods contain a lot of sugar. This applies to many kinds of fruit yoghurt, yoghurt drinks, breakfast cereal, juices, rice snacks and the like. Getting children used to everything tasting sweet is not necessary. Instead of fruit yoghurt, for example, you can give them natural yoghurt or sour milk with fruit or berries mixed in. As regards breakfast cereal and muesli, there are many kinds that don't contain a lot of sugar.

Read the packaging for how much sugar the product contains. You can also choose products with the Keyhole symbol. The symbol can only be put on breakfast cereal, yoghurt, and sour milk with a low sugar content and no sweeteners.



Solanine in green potatoes

Green or damaged potatoes contain solanine, a substance that can cause stomach pains, vomiting, and diarrhoea. Both children and adults should therefore avoid these potatoes.




The most important advice, in brief

It's good for children to have

- different types of food – it gets them used to many flavours, and they get a good variety of food
- food regularly – breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and 2-3 healthy snacks
- potatoes, pasta, rice, bulgur, cous-cous, bread, breakfast cereal or grains every day
- Fish 2-3 times a week meat, chicken, eggs, beans, lentils, or tofu every day
- vegetables with every meal, and fruit or berries every day
- light milk, sour milk, or yoghurt
- margarine on bread and liquid margarine or oil in cooked food
- water or milk as a mealtime drink.
- Continue giving D drops every day until your child is two years old. Some children need D drops even after turning two.
- Choose iodized salt for your food, but don't use too much of it. Avoid salty snacks for as long as possible.

Avoid, or be careful with

- Candy, drink mixes, and soft drinks for as long as possible and be frugal with coffee cakes, buns, and sweet snacks.
 - Children should eat herring from the Baltic, wild salmon and trout from the Baltic and Lakes Vänern and Vättern, whitefish from Lake Vänern, and brook trout from Lake Vättern at most 2-3 times a year.
 - Food supplements and health foods – consult your Child Health Centre before giving them to your child.
 - Do not give unpasteurised milk and curd cheese from unpasteurised milk to children.
 - Do not give raw minced meat and raw meat to children; cook minced meat and chicken thoroughly.
 - Small children are susceptible to food poisoning. Good hygiene is important when preparing food with or for your child.
 - If you suspect your child can't tolerate a food, it's important not to start eliminating foods by yourself. Always consult first with the staff at the Child Health Centre.
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There is information on food for
children, and much more.



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