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## How your toddler can get the nutrients he needs

Reviewed by the [BabyCenter Medical Advisory Board](#)

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### Calcium

Your toddler needs 500 milligrams (mg.) of calcium a day. Calcium is key for building strong bones and teeth, for promoting nerve and muscle function, for helping blood clot, and for activating enzymes that convert food into energy. Some experts believe that many children are falling short of their calcium requirements, in part because juice and other nondairy drinks are so popular that kids are drinking less milk.

#### Some of the best sources of calcium for your toddler:

*Note: Milligrams will vary somewhat depending on brand, size of fruit or vegetable, etc.*

- 1/2 cup yogurt: 190 mg.
- 1/2 cup calcium-fortified orange juice: 175 mg.
- 1 tablespoon blackstrap molasses: 172 mg. (regular molasses: about 41 mg. per tablespoon)
- 1/2 ounce cheddar cheese: 153 mg.
- 1/2 cup milk: about 150 mg. (1/2 cup chocolate milk: about 140 mg.) *Note: The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends [sticking to whole milk](#) until your child turns 2.*
- 1/2 cup fortified soy milk: 150 mg.
- 1/4 cup whole-milk ricotta cheese: 128 mg.
- 1/2 ounce jack cheese: 106 mg.
- 1/2 ounce Swiss cheese: 102 mg.
- 1/4 cup white beans: 80 mg.
- 1/4 cup cottage cheese: 68 mg.
- 1/2 ounce mozzarella: 75 mg.
- 1/2 slice cheese pizza: 59 mg.
- 1/2 cup calcium-fortified apple juice: 50 mg.
- 1/2 serving hot chocolate from mix prepared with water: 48 mg.
- 1/4 cup collard greens: 88 mg.
- 1/4 cup pudding (homemade from mix or scratch): 75 mg. (ready-to eat varieties: about 50 mg.)
- 1/3 cup O-shaped multigrain cereal: 32 mg.
- 1/4 cup spinach, cooked: 73 mg.
- 1/4 cup frozen yogurt: 52 mg.
- 1/4 cup cooked macaroni and cheese (from a packaged mix): 50 mg.
- 1/2 orange: 25 mg.
- 1/4 cup ice cream: 46 mg.
- 1/4 sweet potato, mashed: 17 mg.
- 1/4 cup tofu: 102 mg. *Note: Tofu varies in nutrients, depending on the type. This figure is for tofu made with calcium sulfate and magnesium chloride.*
- 1/4 cup broccoli: 15 mg.

**A few tips for maximizing calcium intake:**

- Use milk instead of water when making cereals and soups.
- Use evaporated milk in place of regular milk in recipes — it has twice the calcium of regular milk.
- Add yogurt to fruit salads; nonfat milk powder to pancake batter, sauces, and smoothies; and cheese to vegetables, sauces, and mashed potatoes.
- Buy calcium-fortified juice, bread, and cereal.

**Iron**

Your toddler needs 7 mg. of iron every day. Iron is important for making hemoglobin, the oxygen-carrying red pigment in blood, and myoglobin, a pigment that stores oxygen in muscles. Lack of iron can cause [anemia](#), which can result in fatigue, weakness, and irritability. Iron also affects brain development. Iron deficiency is the most common nutritional deficiency in the United States.

Keep in mind that there's a difference between animal and plant sources of iron. Heme iron — the kind you get from animal sources such as meat, fish, shellfish, and poultry — is easily absorbed by the body. But the body needs help to absorb non-heme iron — the kind found in non-animal sources like dark green leafy vegetables, legumes, fortified breads and grains, and dried fruits. (Egg yolks also contain iron, mostly non-heme.)

You can increase the amount of non-heme iron the body absorbs by serving it with foods that contain heme iron, or with foods rich in vitamin C, such as orange juice, oranges, strawberries, red peppers, papaya, broccoli, grapefruit, cantaloupe, tomatoes, mangoes, and potatoes.

**Some of the best sources of iron for your toddler:**

*Note: Milligrams will vary somewhat, depending on brand, cut of meat, etc.*

- 1/4 cup sea vegetables: 9 to 21 mg. (various types of seaweed, widely available in the U.S. as a snack product)
- 1/3 cup fortified, ready-to-eat cereal: 4.5 mg.
- 1/3 cup fortified oatmeal: 4 mg.
- 1/4 cup soybeans: 2.2 mg.
- 1/4 cup baked beans with pork and tomato sauce: 2 mg.
- 1/4 cup navy beans: 1.2 mg.
- 1 ounce steak: 1 mg.
- 1 ounce shrimp: .9 mg.
- 1/4 cup garbanzo beans: .8 mg.
- 1/2 medium-sized hamburger (1.5 oz.): .9 mg.
- 1/4 cup black beans: .9 mg.
- 1 tablespoon wheat germ: .5 mg. iron
- 1/4 cup tofu: .9 mg. *Note: Tofu varies in nutrients, depending on the type. This figure is for tofu made with calcium sulfate and magnesium chloride.*
- 1/2 large egg: .3 mg.
- 1 ounce breast of chicken: .2 mg.

**Zinc**

Your toddler needs 3 mg. of zinc a day. Zinc is needed in more than 70 enzymes that aid digestion and metabolism. And children who don't get enough zinc risk stunting their growth. Keep in mind, though, that zinc deficiencies are rare in this country.

**Some of the best sources of zinc for your toddler:**

*Note: Milligrams will vary somewhat, depending on brand, cut of meat, etc.*

- 1/4 cup baked beans with pork and tomato sauce: 3.5 mg.
- 1/2 medium-sized hamburger: about 2 mg.
- 1 ounce steak: about 1.7 mg.
- 1 tablespoon wheat germ: about 1 mg.
- 1/4 cup whole-milk ricotta cheese: .7 mg.
- 1/3 cup bran flakes: between .8 mg. and 1.4 mg., depending on the brand
- 1/4 cup tofu: .6 mg. *Note: Tofu varies in nutrients, depending on the type. This figure is for tofu made with calcium sulfate and magnesium chloride.*

- 1/4 cup garbanzo beans: about .6 mg.
- 1/4 cup lentils: about .6 mg.
- 1/4 cup limas: .4 mg.
- 1/4 cup corn: .2 mg.
- 1 large egg yolk or 1/2 whole large egg: .3 mg.

## Vitamin D

Surprisingly, the requirement for vitamin D — 200 IUs or 5 micrograms per day — is the same from birth to age 50. Vitamin D helps the body absorb minerals like calcium and builds strong teeth and bones. It's called the "sunshine vitamin" because the body can make it when the skin is exposed to sunlight. But vitamin D production is prevented by smog, clouds, dark skin, and sunscreen with an SPF of 8 or more, so it's a good idea to make sure your child gets 200 IUs of vitamin D every day from food sources.

### Some of the best sources of vitamin D for your toddler:

*Note: IUs will vary somewhat, depending on brand.*

- 1 ounce salmon serving: 103 IUs
- 1 ounce tuna (canned in oil, drained): 200 IUs
- 1/2 cup fortified whole milk: 49 IUs
- 1 large egg yolk: 25 IUs
- 1/3 cup fortified, ready-to-eat cereal: 13 IUs
- 1/2 teaspoon fortified margarine: 10 IUs

## Vitamin A

Your toddler needs 300 micrograms RAEs (retinol activity equivalents) of vitamin A daily. Vitamin A plays an important role in vision and bone growth, and helps protect the body from infections. Vitamin A also promotes the health and growth of cells and tissues in the body, particularly those in the hair, nails, and skin.

And about those rumors: Yes, carrots and other vitamin A-rich foods are essential for good eyesight. And while it's possible to get too much vitamin A from animal sources like liver, it's nearly impossible to overdose by getting "too many" carotenoids, the orange and yellow pigments in fruits and vegetables, like carrots. (Be sure to serve carrots cooked, as raw carrots are a choking hazard for toddlers.)

### Some of the best sources of vitamin A for your toddler:

*Note: Micrograms will vary somewhat, depending on size of fruit or vegetable.*

- 1/4 cup mashed sweet potato: 646 mcg. RAE
- 1/4 cup cooked carrots: 336 mcg. RAE
- 1/4 cup butternut squash (cubed): about 286 mcg. RAE
- 1/2 cup fortified milk: 72.5 mcg. RAE
- 1/2 large egg: 35 mcg. RAE
- 1/4 cup cooked broccoli: 26 mcg. RAE
- 1/4 cup sliced mango: 16 mcg. RAE

## Vitamin C

Your toddler needs 15 milligrams of vitamin C a day. Vitamin C helps form and repair red blood cells, bones, and tissues. It helps keep your child's gums healthy and strengthens his blood vessels, minimizing bruising from falls and scrapes. Vitamin C helps heal cuts and wounds, boosts the immune system, and keeps infections at bay. And it helps the body absorb iron from plant-based foods. This vitamin is available in many foods, so deficiencies are rare.

### Some of the best sources of vitamin C for your toddler:

*Note: Milligrams will vary somewhat, depending on size of fruit or vegetable.*

- 1/4 cup guava: 82.5 mg.
- 1/4 cup papaya: 47.5 mg.
- 1/2 medium orange: 30 mg.

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- 1/4 cup broccoli: 30 mg.
- 1/4 cup orange juice: 25 mg.
- 3 whole medium strawberries: 21 mg.
- 1/4 grapefruit: 21 mg.
- 1/4 cup cantaloupe: 17 mg.
- 1/2 tomato: 11 mg.
- 1/4 medium mango: 7.6 mg.
- 1/2 banana: 5 mg.
- 1/4 baking potato (such as Russet): 5 mg. without skin, 6.5 with skin
- 1/4 cup spinach: 4.5 mg.

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