

## Babies toddlers and food - Q & A

This fact sheet lists a range of questions on food for babies and preschoolers that were posted by visitors to the Better Health Channel. Our experts provide the answers.

### **Q. I've heard soymilk formula has a high aluminium content. Is this true?**

Many foods contain aluminium in small amounts. All infant formulas need to adhere to the Australian New Zealand Food Standards. You could ask your maternal and child health nurse or doctor to advise you. There are many alternatives to soy formulas, so it may also be worth talking to your nurse or doctor about why you are interested in using a soy formula and what the alternatives could be for your child.

### **Q. Can you suggest some snack ideas for three year olds?**

Three-year-old children are full of energy! They are busy learning and developing at a great rate. Because of this, they have high energy and nutritional requirements. It is important to offer young children healthy snacks between meals to keep up with this energy and nutritional demand.

While children should be encouraged to sit at the table to eat, for safety reasons, snack times do not usually have the formality of mealtimes. Snack food can be healthy and fun. Remember to offer a limited choice of what they enjoy, but try to vary the snacks offered. There is a range of snack foods suitable for a three year old. Remember, though, that many processed snack foods are high in sugar.

### **Vegetables**

Examples of vegetable snack foods include:

- Celery sticks filled with cream cheese, hommus or peanut butter
- Carrot sticks, celery sticks, sugar snap peas or raw beans with dip
- A small sandwich with a vegetable filling that your child enjoys.

### **Breads**

Examples of healthy snacks containing bread include:

- Strips of flat bread and dips
- Toast or English muffins with grilled melted cheese
- Fresh bread rolled up with cream cheese, vegemite or a spread that your child likes, cut in a spiral
- Bread rolled around fillings such as grated cheese or carrot
- A small sandwich with a healthy filling that your child enjoys.

### **Fruit**

It is important for small children to sit down if they are eating hard fruits such as apples. Examples of healthy snacks containing fruit include:

- Fruit cut into pieces arranged on a plate
- Dried fruit such as sultanas or dried apricots
- Banana sandwiches.

### **Dairy**

Examples of snack foods containing dairy include:

- Pieces of cheese
- Small tubs of yoghurt

- Yoghurt smoothies made with fruits like strawberry or banana (you could freeze the smoothy into icy poles on hot days).

### **Other ideas**

Other ideas for healthy snack foods include:

- Muffins with fruit or cheese in them (your child can help to make them)
- Fruit loaf made with wholemeal flour and dried fruit
- Small pancakes or pikelets (you can mix in some cheese or fruit such as grated apple).

Many cookbooks and magazines available in supermarkets and bookstores have other great inexpensive ideas.

**Q. My son has just turned three. He has a good appetite and likes a range of foods including fruit, vegetables, bread, pasta and meat. (Of course, he also likes lollies and other treats.) He has at least three bowel movements a day, which seems to be more than other children his age. Could he be getting too much fibre? He's healthy and active and growing well, but toilet training is proving a bit difficult.**

The diet you describe is healthy and appropriate for your child's age. It is good to hear that he enjoys such a range of foods. Well done!

It is not unusual for young children to have three bowel actions per day or even one bowel action every couple of days. Fibre provides bulk but does not usually result in frequent bowel actions. Check the colour and consistency of your child's faeces (poo). Even the colour can vary considerably depending on what your child has eaten.

Normal bowel actions are easy to pass and well formed. Bowel actions can change if your child is unwell. They may become more frequent, watery and loose (diarrhoea) or hard and pebble-like (constipation). If either of these situations occurs, speak to your maternal and child health nurse or seek medical advice from your doctor.

You mention that your child is healthy and active and growing well. Remember fruit juices and sweet drinks can stimulate bowel actions. Also don't forget your three-and-a-half year old developmental assessment. This is a good opportunity for general discussion.

You do not describe the difficulty with your son's toilet training. If there is a delay in bowel control, there are a number of steps you can take, including:

- Discuss the issue openly with your child, but keep it simple and don't judge too hard for a child aged three-and-a-half years and above.
- Recognise any patterns, such as using his bowels after meals, and follow them.
- Encourage him to go to the toilet if he is delaying going or busy playing.
- Offer him praise when he is successful.
- Consider using a behaviour reward system. At the age of three, he may respond to a star chart.
- Be very patient, as some children take longer than others. Rushing this developmental stage can result in your child resisting your efforts, so toilet training takes a lot longer.
- Resist the temptation to compare him with his peers – rest assured, he will be out of nappies when he goes to school!

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Maternal and Child Health nurse
- Parent Line Tel. 132 289
- Tweddle Child and Family Health Service Tel. (03) 9689 1577
- Maternal and Child Health line, Victoria (24 hour) Tel. 132 229

### **Want to know more?**

Go to More information for support groups, related links and references.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

## Tweddle Child and Family Health Services

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