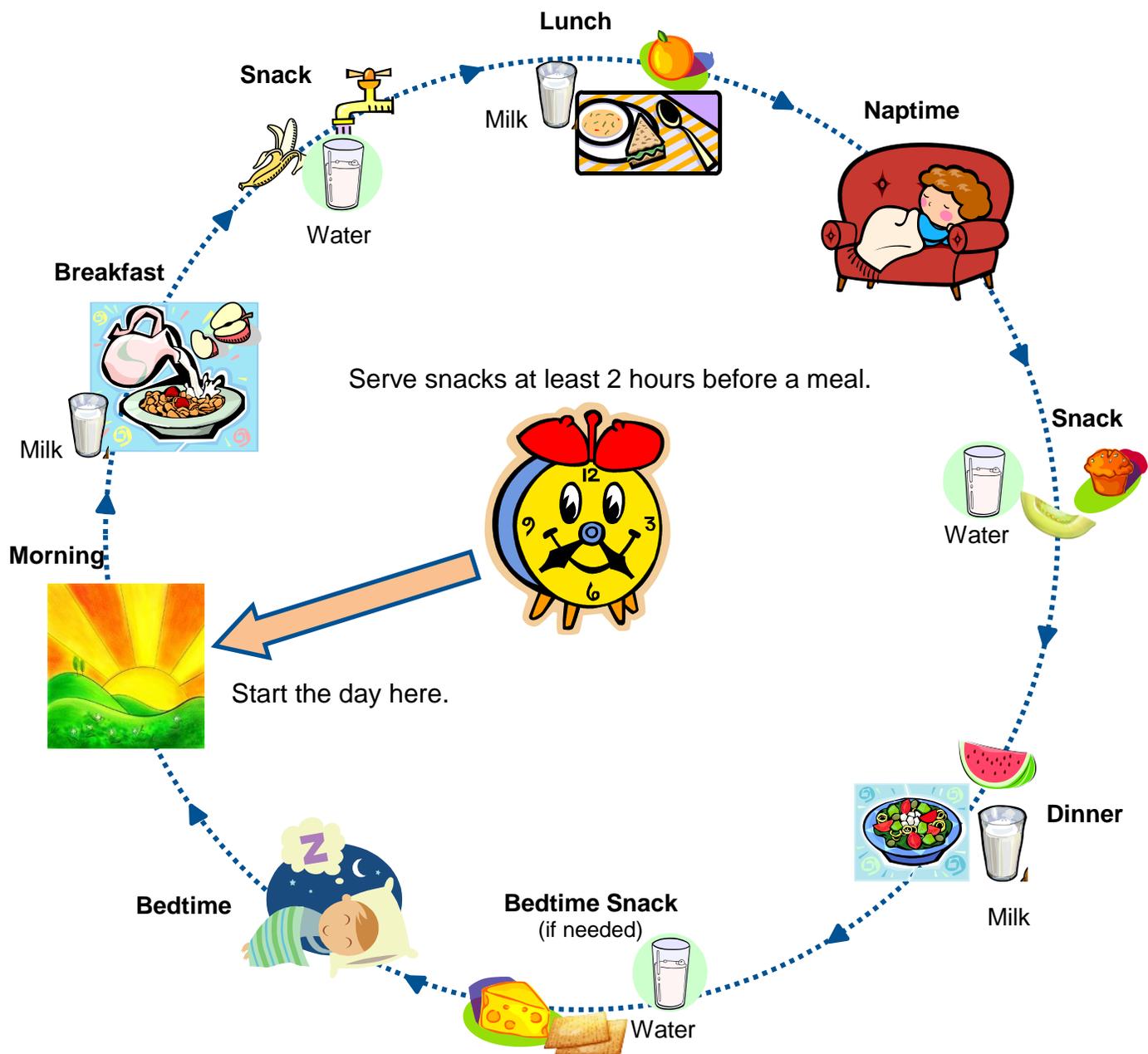


Eating Routine for Young Children

Why is an eating routine so important?

Your toddler needs a meal and snack routine to help them develop good eating habits from an early age.

Schedules and routines are important for toddlers. These help your toddler gain trust, security, and order.



Eating Routine for Your Toddler (12 to 24 months)

You decide *when* to offer food

- Try to serve meals and snacks at about the same time each day to avoid grazing and continuous snacking, and so your child comes to the table hungry.
- Serve 3 meals and 2 to 3 small snacks a day.
- Plan ahead for meals and snacks when away from home so that the routine is maintained.

You decide *where* to offer food

- Sit and eat together as a family. Children learn to eat by watching you.
- Turn off all electronics and put away toys and books at mealtimes.
- Focus on pleasant conversation rather than on the amount of food your child is eating.

You decide *what* foods and drinks to offer

- Offer your child small amounts of the same foods as the rest of the family.
- Offer a familiar food with a new one. Be patient. You may have to introduce a new food many times before your child learns to eat it.
- Offer your child water in an open cup when they are thirsty and in between meals or snacks.
- If your toddler is not receiving breast milk, offer 2 cups (500mL) of 3.25% M.F. cow's milk in total, but not more than 3 cups (750mL) each day.
- Your child does not need juice. If you offer juice, limit it to no more than ½ cup of 100% unsweetened juice a day.

Your child decides to eat and how much

- Trust your child's appetite. Let their hunger, not rules, pleading, or bargaining determine how much they eat.
- Give your child more if they want, even if they haven't finished other foods on their plate. Some days they will eat a lot, some days they will eat very little. This is normal.
- Trust your child to eat as much as they need. If your child says "no" to a food, a snack or a meal, that is okay. A skipped meal or snack will not harm them.

How might my toddler behave when food is offered?

- Most toddlers can be picky when it comes to food. This is normal. They may eat only a few foods then suddenly refuse them.
- Teach your toddler to politely say "No thank you" to foods they do not want to eat.
- Most children are not able to sit more than 15 minutes at the dinner table. It's okay for them to leave when they have shown no more interest in food.
- Your child will take longer to eat than you do. They learn to eat by touching, smelling and looking. Expect a mess.

For questions about your child's nutrition, call 8-1-1 to speak to a registered dietitian at [HealthLinkBC](https://www.healthlinkbc.ca).

Online:

Go to [fraserhealth.ca/feedingyourchild](https://www.fraserhealth.ca/feedingyourchild)



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