

## Milk Consumption and Your Toddler

By Karen Crawford, MS, RD, CSP

In spending time with my two sisters who have little ones of varying ages, I realized that milk consumption, calcium requirements and recommendations for both can be very confusing for new moms. During the first year, nutrition is very clear and pretty straight forward- breastfeeding, formula, or a combination of both. Even the introduction of solids is pretty well explained on the containers of baby food. So without research, you can figure things out right then and there at the grocery store. However, once your little one comes off infant food and begins drinking from a sippy cup, things can get a little complicated.

Somewhere around the age of 12 months, a typically developing child can begin to drink whole milk. The fat in whole milk is necessary for brain development. This is an important part of your child's diet from ages 1 to 2. And somewhere around 2 years of age, a typically developing child can begin to drink low fat milk and even skim milk. The chart below outlines the nutritional content of milk for calories, total fat, saturated fat and calcium. Toddlers between the ages of 1 to 3 require 500 mg of calcium per day. Take a look.

**Milk Comparison Chart:**

<u>Milk Type</u>	<u>Calories (kcal)</u>	<u>Total Fat (gm)</u>	<u>Sat Fat (gm)</u>	<u>Calcium (mg)</u>
Whole Milk	146	8	5	300
2% Fat Milk	137	5	3	300
1% Fat Milk	102	2	2	300
Skim Milk	86	0	0	300

*\*Nutritional content is based on 8 fluid ounces.*

You will notice that despite the calorie and fat content of milk, the calcium content remains the same. Skim milk has the same amount of calcium as whole milk ounce for ounce. So, where your little one is saving on fat and calories, she is still getting a great source of calcium. But do keep in mind that from the age of 1 to 2, the fat content of the diet should not be restricted and whole milk is recommended. After a toddler reaches the age of 2, the fat requirement of their diet decreases. The fat and saturated fat content of whole milk is not necessary and a 2 year old child may begin to drink low fat milk in place of whole milk.

Some toddlers can be switched from whole milk to lower fat milk in one single swoop.

However, other children may need to be transitioned over time. If your toddler is particularly

picky about textures, you will want to work towards skim milk over a span of time. Milk should be given to toddlers with each meal and other beverages, including juice, should be limited.

If you are unsure of your child's nutritional needs, ask your pediatrician for guidance. Due to certain medical conditions, some children require extra fat and calories in their diet making whole milk a necessary part of the diet past the age of 2. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Dietetic Association are great resources for nutrition information as well. If you are having a difficult time getting your toddler to drink milk at all you can try flavoring the milk. The small amount of sugar that you will be adding to the milk is insignificant in comparison to the nutrients your child will be getting. Other good sources of calcium are yogurt, low fat pudding, low fat ice cream and cheese. Good luck!

References:

American Academy of Pediatrics: [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

American Dietetic Association: [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)