

GROWING HEALTHY BABIES



A CONSUMER'S GUIDE TO PREPARING HOMEMADE BABY FOOD



Why Homemade?

Nutritional Value ♦ The nutritional superiority of homemade baby food is the best reason to make your own. Commercial baby foods, like most prepared foods, may be over refined and contain starch, sugar and salt.

Taste ♦ Try a taste test with commercial baby food and homemade. You'll most likely find that the store bought food is bland because it's been watered down by fillers. By using fresh ingredients in the food you're preparing for your baby, your child will experience its rich, natural taste.

Cost ♦ The cost of commercially prepared baby food is almost double that of homemade.

Bonding with Your Child ♦ The love and attention that you put into preparing food for your baby cannot be matched by the large baby food manufacturers, no matter what the quality of the product they turn out.

Kitchen Basics

You will find that you have most of the equipment needed to make home-cooked meals for your child.

Blender and/or food processor	Freezer bags or reusable containers
Hand mixer	Strainer/colander
Grinder	Fine mesh strainer
Ice cube trays	Steamer basket
Permanent marker	Masher

Starting Solids

Until six months or so, breast milk or formula provides all the nutrients your baby needs. After six months, her digestive system will be ready for solids, and so will her appetite!

Baby rice cereal, mixed with expressed breast milk or formula, is a good starter food, but you can also introduce single-ingredient purées during the first four weeks of weaning. Simple purées enable you to assess how each new food suits your child and get her accustomed to a wide range of single fruits and vegetables before they are mixed together.

Ideal First Foods

- ♦ Baby rice cereal
- ♦ Sweet apples
- ♦ Pears
- ♦ Papayas
- ♦ Bananas
- ♦ Avocados
- ♦ Broccoli
- ♦ Carrots
- ♦ Potatoes
- ♦ Sweet potatoes
- ♦ Butternut squash
- ♦ Pumpkin

Choose Produce Carefully

Children especially benefit from organic produce because their growing bodies are less efficient at eliminating toxins. Buy organic produce whenever possible, especially those that are the most contaminated with pesticides: Apples, bell peppers, celery, cherries, imported grapes, lettuce, nectarines, peaches, pears, potatoes, spinach, and strawberries.

Purée Basics

Baby's first purées are easy to prepare. Many first foods, such as mashed bananas and avocados, make excellent baby purées and do not require any cooking at all. For other fruits and vegetables, simple cooking techniques can be used.

Steaming preserves the taste and nutrients of fresh produce and preserves more antioxidants than either boiling or microwaving.

Boiling is cooking just until tender in the minimum amount of water. Be careful not to overcook, or nutrients can be destroyed.

Baking is a nutrient retaining, and labor-saving cooking method. Potatoes, sweet potatoes, and squash can be washed, pricked with a fork, and baked until tender. Then scoop out the flesh and mash.

Blend uncooked soft fruits or steamed harder fruits or vegetables in a food processor for quick and easy smooth purées.

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Freezing and Reheating

Batch-cooking and freezing purées are the most time efficient way to make food for your baby. Only a few first purées (bananas, avocado, melon, and eggplant) do not freeze well.

Allow freshly cooked purée to cool to room temperature, and then spoon it into clean ice-cube trays. Wrap in a freezer bag and transfer the trays to the freezer. Transfer frozen cubes into a fresh freezer bag or freezer tubs and seal tightly, label and date. Store in freezer up to six weeks.

When you're ready to use frozen purée, take the amount needed from freezer and heat in a pan or microwave until piping hot. Stir and allow to cool before serving. Always test the temperature of the food by touching it to your wrist or upper lip. Reheat food only once; after that, it should be thrown away.

You can thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator if you leave space around the food for air to circulate. Never thaw foods at room temperature or with hot water. These methods allow bacteria to multiply on the warm surface of the food while the interior remains frozen.

Moving from Purées

The period between six and nine months is a time of rapid development, and your baby will spend many more hours awake. This is a good time to introduce plenty of new flavors in addition to the ones she already knows.

Gradually introduce your baby to coarser textures and new flavors: mash, grate, and finely chop food instead of puréeing, and combine sweet with savory ingredients.

Textures

At this age, your baby may be on the way to eating three main meals a day, so that he receives a combination of starchy food, protein, and fruit or vegetables. He will manage coarser textures, especially with the arrival of teeth to improve his chewing.

Self-Feeding

Your baby will need progressively less help to eat, and may prefer to spoon soft food up for himself. Using a two-spoon system is helpful as babies work on their hand-eye coordination skills. Give him a spoon to hold so that he can make his own attempts at self-feeding, and use another spoon yourself to get some of the food into his mouth.

Finger Foods

When your baby is teething, finger foods may be more appealing than eating from a spoon. Choose sizes and shapes that will not cause choking. Some ideal finger foods include:

Vegetables ♦ Carrot or cucumber sticks, cauliflower, or peas. It is best to lightly steam veggies or cook them in a little boiling water for a few minutes so that they are still a little crunchy but not completely hard.

Fruit ♦ Banana chunks or apple or pear slices. Introduce soft fruit at first.

Dried fruit ♦ Apricots, figs, or apple pieces

Bread ♦ Toast fingers or plain bread sticks

Mini sandwiches ♦ Fill with soft ingredients such as mashed bananas or cream cheese

Cheese ♦ Cheddar sticks, cheese slices, or mini cheeses

Dry cereals and rice cakes

Cooked pasta shapes

Meat ♦ Small pieces of chicken or turkey or mini meatballs

Allergies

These foods may trigger an allergic reaction in babies. Wait until baby is one year old before introducing these:

- ♦ Cow's milk and dairy products
- ♦ Nuts and seeds
- ♦ Egg whites
- ♦ Wheat-based products
- ♦ Fish and shellfish
- ♦ Soy
- ♦ Sesame seeds
- ♦ Berries
- ♦ Citrus fruits
- ♦ Kiwi fruits

Sources

Homemade Baby Food, Pure & Simple by Connie Linardakis

First Meals: Fast, healthy, and fun foods to tempt infants and toddlers by Annabel Karmel

Other Resources

Feeding the Whole Family: Recipes for Babies, Young Children, and Their Parents by Cynthia Lair

www.annabelkarmel.com ♦ www.drgreene.com

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