

## Homemade Baby Food

Making baby food at home can be an easy and cost-effective way to make sure your baby gets the nutrition they need. However, care must be taken to make sure that the infant's food is prepared safely and is age-appropriate. The texture and ingredients that can be used vary depending on the age of the infant.

### Food Selection

When selecting food to make for your baby, make sure to choose high-quality ingredients.

Fresh fruits and vegetables or plain frozen ones are best. Canned fruits and vegetables can be used, but they may contain added salt or sugar, so it is important to rinse them thoroughly before using them. Never use expired cans or home-canned products. Examples of fruits and vegetables that can be used to make baby food include:

- Asparagus
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Kale
- Green beans
- Summer or winter squashes
- Sweet potatoes
- Bananas
- Cantaloupe and other melons
- Apples
- Pears
- Avocado
- Peaches
- Plums

Do not feed infants less than 6 months of age spinach, beets, turnips, carrots or collard greens. These foods are high in nitrates, which can make babies sick.

Meats should be USDA government-inspected. Fish should be a variety of finfish (flounder, haddock, cod and salmon). Frozen or fresh is fine, but if it is frozen, make sure to thaw properly before cooking. All meats, poultry and fish should be stored in a refrigerator or freezer after purchase if it is not cooked right away.

The following should not be served to infants because of their high fat and/or salt content:

- Bacon
- Hot dogs
- Sausage
- Salami and other deli meats
- Fried animal foods (such as pork rinds)

When buying eggs for your infant, buy grade AA or A eggs with clean, uncracked shells. Do not buy unrefrigerated or unpasteurized eggs. Infants should not be fed homemade ice cream, mayonnaise or eggnog, as they are often made with whole, raw eggs and can increase the risk of an allergic reaction.

## Preparation

Babies are very susceptible to foodborne illness because of their underdeveloped immune systems, so it is important to sanitize all equipment before using them. Make sure everything, including the food preparation area, is washed with soap and hot water and air-dried. Always wash your hands before touching the infant's food.

Food can be processed with the following equipment to achieve the desired texture:

- Blender or food processor: purees vegetables, meats and fruits to a smooth consistency.
- Fine mesh strainer: push ripe or cooked fruits and vegetables through the strainer with the back of a spoon to puree.

Table food should not be chewed and then given to the infant, as bacteria from saliva can cause illness and dilute the nutrient content of the food.

Food that cannot be mashed should be steamed or cooked until soft. Do not overcook, as this removes important nutrients. After cooking, the food should be allowed to cool for about 15 minutes before being pureed or mashed.

When preparing food, follow these tips and guidelines:

- Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly and remove inedible parts (peels, pits, etc.).
- Remove fat, skin and bones from meat, fish and poultry before cooking.
- Make sure all meat, poultry and fish is cooked properly (160 F for ground meats, steaks, roasts, egg dishes, pork cuts and chops; 165 F for ground poultry; and 145 F for fish).
- Never feed the infant partially cooked or raw animal by-products.
- Do not feed egg whites to infants to minimize the risk of an allergic reaction; only feed them the yolk.
- Honey should never be used in preparation because of the risk of infant botulism.
- It is not necessary to add salt, sugar, syrups, oil, butter, cream or other fats to vegetables and fruits.
- Warm meats are easier to puree in a blender or food processor.
- Use water or formula to thin out food that may be too thick.
- Do not cook food at a temperature lower than 325 F. Food cooked at a lower temperature may not kill all bacteria.

Because an infant's allergies are unknown, introduce one food at a time and watch for any allergic reactions (swelling, wheezing, hives).

When you have tested foods out separately to make sure there are no allergies, you can begin combining them. Try the following combinations:

- Banana, pear and applesauce
- Pinto beans, rice and tomato
- Egg yolk and avocado

## Storing Food

If you are serving the food immediately, make sure it is cool enough so as not to burn the baby's mouth. Do not allow foods to stand at room temperature for more than two hours.

Homemade foods should be frozen or refrigerated right after preparation. Foods that will be frozen should be cooled in the refrigerator before being placed in the freezer. If you are refrigerating your foods:

- Keep hot foods in the fridge in shallow containers with the food less than 3 inches deep. Cover the container only after the food has cooled.
- Use refrigerated food within two days (meats, poultry, fish and eggs should be used within 24 hours).
- Mark containers with the date and time the food inside was prepared, and throw out anything older than three days.

Infant food can also be frozen until used. You can freeze baby food for up to a month. If you are freezing your foods:

- Try freezing cooked and pureed food in a clean ice cube tray. Cover with plastic wrap and freeze. When frozen, the cubes can be placed in a freezer container or bag.
- You can use a cookie sheet and place one to two tablespoons of cooked pureed food on it, then cover and freeze. The food pieces can then be stored in a freezer container or bag.
- Label and date all bags and containers and use within one month.
- Make sure your freezer is set at the correct temperature (0 F or below).

When reheating any baby food, make sure it is reheated to 165 F to kill any bacteria that grew while it was in storage. Never refreeze food that has already been thawed. Thawed food should be used within 48 hours of when it was removed from the freezer.

Always throw out any baby food leftovers in the dish after feeding to avoid contamination. To minimize waste, take out only what you think your baby will eat and put it in a separate dish.

## Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- Foodsafety.gov: [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov)
- United States Department of Agriculture: [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

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