



Finger Foods for Babies

Until now, feeding your baby has been your job. But as your baby gets older, your little one will want to do this more and more on his or her own.

When babies begin feeding themselves — a new task most really enjoy — they'll find that they like trying new tastes and textures. No longer are baby purees and mushy cereals the only things on the menu.

By the time they're 9 months old, most babies have developed the fine motor skills — the small, precise movements — needed to pick up small pieces of food and feed themselves. You may notice that yours can take hold of food (and other small objects) between forefinger and thumb in a pincer grasp. The pincer grasp starts out a little clumsy, but with practice soon evolves into a masterful and efficient skill.

Allow your child to self-feed as much as possible, though you'll still be helping out by spoon-feeding cereal and other important dietary elements. Encouraging finger feeding helps your child develop independent, healthy eating habits.

Finger feeding — and using utensils a little later — gives babies a measure of control over what they eat and how much. Sometimes they'll eat the food, sometimes not, and that's all part of the process of learning self-regulation. Even little kids can tell when they're hungry or full, so let them learn to recognize and respond to these cues.

What Should a Baby Eat?

Now that they're joining the rest of the family for meals, older babies are ready — and often willing — to try more table foods.

This means more work for whoever is preparing the meals for the family, but dishes often can be adapted for the baby. For instance, your little one can have some of the zucchini you're making for dinner as long as you cook that portion just a bit longer — until it's soft — and cut it into pieces that are small enough for the baby to handle. Pieces of ripe banana, well-cooked pasta, and small pieces of chicken are other good choices.

Before presenting your child with a finger food, try a bite first and ask yourself:

- Does it melt in the mouth? Some dry cereals and crackers that are light and flaky will melt in the mouth.
- Is it cooked enough so that it mashes easily? Well-cooked veggies and fruits will mash easily, as will canned fruit and vegetables (choose ones without added sugar or salt).
- Is it naturally soft? Cottage cheese, shredded cheese, and small pieces of tofu are good examples.
- Can it be gummed? Pieces of ripe banana and well-cooked pasta can be gummed.
- Is it small enough? Food should be cut into small pieces. The sizes will vary depending on the food's texture. A piece of chicken, for instance, needs to be smaller than a piece of watermelon, which even a pair of baby gums will quickly smash.

If your child doesn't like a food, don't let that stop you from offering it at future meals. Kids are naturally slow to accept new tastes and textures. For example, some are more sensitive to texture and may reject coarse foods, such as meat. When introducing meat, it's helpful to start with well-cooked ground meats or shreds of thinly sliced deli meats, such as turkey.

Present your baby with a variety of foods, even some that he or she didn't seem to like the week before. Don't force your baby to eat, but realize that it can take 10 or more tries before a child will accept a new food.

Finger Foods to Avoid

Finger feeding is fun and rewarding for older babies, but it's important to avoid foods that can cause choking and those with little nutritional value.

Choking Hazards

Parents and caregivers can help prevent choking by supervising the baby during eating. Foods that are choking hazards include:

- pieces of raw vegetables or hard fruits
- whole grapes, berries, cherry or grape tomatoes (instead, peel and slice or cut in quarters)
- raisins and other dried fruit
- peanuts, nuts, and seeds
- large scoops of peanut butter and other nut or seed butters (use only a thin layer)
- whole hot dogs and kiddie sausages (peel and cut these in very small pieces)
- untoasted bread, especially white bread that sticks together
- chunks of cheese or meat
- candy (hard candy, jelly beans, gummies, chewing gum)
- popcorn, pretzels, corn chips, and other snack foods
- marshmallows

Hold the Sweets

At first bite, your baby probably will love the taste of cookies, cake, and other sweets, but do not introduce them now. Your little one needs to eat nutrient-rich foods instead of consuming empty calories found in desserts and high-fat snacks, such as potato chips.

It's tempting to want to see the baby's reactions to some of these foods, but now is not the time. Grandparents and others may want to rush your baby into trying triple-chocolate cake or some other family favorite. Politely and firmly explain that the baby isn't ready for those foods. You can blame this tough love on your child's doctor — the doctor won't mind.

Reviewed by: Elana Pearl Ben-Joseph, MD

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Post Test – January 2020

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1. When babies begin feeding themselves, they'll find that they like trying new _____ and _____.
2. By the time they are 9 months old, most babies have developed the _____ needed to pick up small pieces of food and feed themselves.
3. Young children cannot tell when they are hungry or full.
True or False?
4. It may be more work but dishes can be _____ for the baby.
5. _____ veggies and fruits will mush easily, as will canned fruits and vegetables.
6. Cottage cheese, shredded cheese and small pieces of tofu are good examples of naturally _____ foods.
7. If your child doesn't like a food, don't let it stop you from offering it at future meals.
True or False?
8. It is important to avoid foods that can cause _____ and those with little nutritional value.
9. When serving _____ and other nut or seed butters use only a thin layer so it is not a choking hazard.
10. Babies need to eat nutrient-rich foods instead of consuming _____ found in desserts and high-fat snacks.

December 2019 Quiz Answers. 1.Vegetarian 2.False 3.Vegans 4.Fiber/Fat
5.False 6.Iron 7.Vitamins/Minerals 8.Adolescents 9.Dairy/Eggs
10.Deficiencies



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