

Making Your Own Baby Food

By Nellie Hedstrom, Extension nutrition specialist.

Peer reviewers: Kathleen Savoie, Extension educator, and Jane Conroy, Extension educator

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With a little planning, and a blender, a fork, a strainer, a food mill or a baby food grinder, you can make foods for your baby at home. Homemade infant food may help cut food costs, and provide baby with food as nutritious, if not more nutritious, than store-bought baby foods. Making your own baby food will also help baby get used to foods the family eats.

Pureed fruits and vegetables can be prepared from fresh-cooked fruits and vegetables. Use the cooked fruits and vegetables without added salt, sugar or fat. Puree means to put food through a sieve or grinder to make the food into a liquid-like, smooth texture. Some foods, like ripe bananas, can be mashed or pureed with a fork and won't need to be precooked. It may be necessary to add some fluid (formula, breast milk, water or cooking water) to other pureed food to make it the right consistency for your baby.

Canned or frozen fruits and vegetables may also be pureed and used. When using commercially processed canned or frozen fruits and vegetables, check the ingredient label. Make sure you are not adding extra sugar, salt and fat to your baby's diet. Other unnecessary additives may also be in canned or frozen foods.

Some commonly home-prepared fruits for babies are ripe mashed bananas, and pureed bananas and applesauce. Dried prunes that have been cooked and pureed are another food for baby. Fresh pears or peaches in season may also be soft-cooked and pureed. Fresh vegetables that can be home prepared and pureed include potato, winter squash, sweet potato, peas, asparagus, and green or wax beans.

Later, when baby is between 8 months through 11 months, table food can be added to her diet. By that time, your baby will be able to move her tongue from side to side, and will have begun to spoon feed herself with your help. She'll also start chewing with her new teeth, and feed herself with her fingers. With your help, she will also drink from a cup.

At this stage, try feeding mashed or diced fruit, soft cooked or mashed vegetables; mashed, cooked egg yolk; strained meats or poultry; mashed, cooked dry beans and peas; cottage cheese or cheese cubes; sliced bread; crackers; and juice in a cup.

Tips for Making Homemade Baby Food

- Work under the most sanitary conditions possible.
- Wash your hands with hot water and soap, scrub, rinse and dry with clean towel before fixing your baby's food, before feeding your baby, and after changing your baby's diapers.
- Scrub all working surfaces with soap and hot water.
- Scrub all equipment with soap and hot water, and rinse well.
- Prepare fresh fruits or vegetables by scrubbing, paring or peeling, and removing seeds.
- Prepare meats by removing all bones, skin, connective tissue, gristle and fat.
- Cook foods, when necessary, boiling them in a small, covered saucepan with a small amount of water until tender. The amount of water is important — the less water used, the more nutrients stay in the food.
- Puree food using a blender, food processor, baby food grinder, spoon or fork. Grind up tough foods. Cut food into small pieces or thin slices. Take out seeds and pits from fruit.
- Test for smoothness by rubbing a small amount of food between your fingers. Add a liquid such as formula, water or fruit juice to achieve a desired consistency.
- If pureed food is not being used right away, refrigerate quickly.
- To freeze: pour cooled, pureed food into a paper cupcake liner or a section of a clean ice cube tray, and cover with foil. When frozen solid, store cubes in a freezer container in the freezer in a freezer bag or box.
- Reheat frozen cube in a heat-resistant container in a pan of hot water.
- When cooking foods for the family, remember to separate the baby's portion before adding seasoning or spices. Babies need very little, if any, added salt or sugar.

Thawing and Warming Baby's Food

Here are some suggestions on thawing and warming food for your baby. Frozen food can be thawed in the refrigerator or the microwave oven on the defrost setting. But remember, food that has been thawed should never be refrozen.

Stove Method: To warm food, place it directly in a saucepan and slowly warm over low heat, stirring often. Stir and test temperature of food before feeding it to your baby.

Microwave Method: Microwave ovens heat foods unevenly and cause hot spots. There may be hot spots even if the food feels cool to you. It is important to stir food well to prevent burns to you or your baby. Here are some other tips:

- Cover dish with a microwave-safe cover, not plastic wrap.
 - Stir food and turn the dish often during the heating process.
 - Allow food to sit for a few minutes; stir well and test temperature before feeding your baby.
 - It is not recommended to heat pureed meats in the microwave. Hot spots in the meat could seriously burn your baby.
 - For other foods, heat food in a microwave-safe dish or an opened baby-food jar.
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Q: Should I avoid certain foods if I make my own baby food?

A: High-nitrate vegetables, such as beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, celery, collard greens, lettuce, spinach and turnips, should not be fed to babies in large quantities. The naturally occurring nitrates in these vegetables can change to nitrites, which bind iron in the blood and make it difficult to carry oxygen. This can make it hard to breathe and cause the skin to become blue. Limit the serving size of these vegetables to one to two tablespoons per feeding.

Equipment Needed to Make Baby Food

Sieve/strainer: It should have a small mesh. You can press foods through it with the back of a spoon. It can be used for juices, soft fruits and vegetables, but not meats.

Spoon, forks and potato masher: Use these to mash soft foods, such as most canned fruits, egg yolks, bananas and potatoes, to the right consistency.

Food mills or grinders: You may already have a food mill in your canning supplies, but if you don't, they are available in stores that sell kitchen supplies. The smaller size baby food mill is similar to the larger version. They can be purchased in the baby section of department stores. It can be used at home or when traveling. The larger mills and grinders are useful when preparing soft meats and both can be used for cooked fruits, vegetables and soft fresh fruits.

Blenders: Your blender can come in handy to prepare food for the baby. Food items cooked for the family can be blended smooth for baby or to freeze for later. Hand-held blenders are useful pieces of equipment that you may want to consider.

Plastic ice cube trays: Use trays for freezing extra food that you prepare. After the food is frozen, remove the cubes and store in a container designed for freezing.

Pureed Baby Food Recipes

Pureed Fruit Delight

1/2 cup freshly cooked (Try apples, pears, peaches or prunes)

Remove skin and seeds. Press through a sieve, or put ingredients in food mill or blender and puree until smooth. Serve or freeze. Freeze no longer than 1 month.

Bananas Plain and Simple

Ripe bananas may be pureed or mashed and fed to your baby directly.

Vegetable Medley

1/2 cup cooked fresh, frozen or low sodium canned vegetables (potato, sweet potato, green beans, peas, carrots, yellow squash), without salt added

Cook fresh vegetables or use frozen or canned vegetables without salt or seasoning. (Read labels for ingredients.) Press vegetable chunks through a sieve or baby food mill, or put in a blender. If necessary, thin pureed vegetables with a small amount of cooking liquid, expressed breast milk or formula to desired consistency. If not serving immediately, do not thin prior to serving. Freeze no longer than 1 month.

Note: After the individual vegetables have been fed several times, some good combinations are: potatoes and carrots, potatoes and green beans, carrots and peas.

Simple Puréed Meat or Poultry

(for babies over 8 months)

1/2 cup cooked meat (small pieces of lean chicken, beef, turkey or pork)

Cook lean meat (fat and skin removed) over low heat in a small amount of water. Puree meat until smooth. If serving, meat puree can be thinned by adding a small amount of water, reserved cooking broth, expressed breast milk, or infant formula. If freezing, do not add liquid. Freeze no longer than one month.

Your Choice Combo Dish

(for babies over 8 months)

1 cup cooked, cubed or diced meat (cut off fat)
1/2 cup cooked rice, potato, noodles or macaroni
2/3 cup cooked, diced vegetables

Combine and blend until smooth. Serve or freeze in serving-size containers. If frozen, use within 1 month.

Note: If you prepare combination dishes, use them only after you have fed the individual food several times.

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