

Finger Foods

Good health depends on sound eating habits. What your child eats and how he or she eats is established in the earliest of years.

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Caution: Foods Not Recommended

A brief list and tips that highlight finger foods that are difficult to digest, cause gagging and choking for babies younger than twelve to eighteen months old.

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6 - 8 months

A list of soft foods best suited for babies of this age and tips on food preparation.

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9 - 12 months

A more advanced listing of foods for babies beginning to show teeth and beginning to show signs of an increased chewing ability.

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12 months plus



A comprehensive listing of foods appropriate for babies with advanced chewing abilities

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12 months plus

Continued list of finger foods, including fruits, meats and grains. In addition, tips and cautionary notes on food preparation are included.

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Introducing finger foods

Finger foods should be introduced when your child's hand-eye coordination has matured enough that he or she is able to pick up objects with fingers or a spoon and get them to his or her mouth. At approximately six to eight months, when your child is able to sit in a high chair and can reach for objects, a graham cracker, a few cheerios or a piece of soft cheese will be of great interest. If you allow your baby to experiment with food (despite the mess), you will have fewer problems in the long run. The more you allow your child to do, the faster he or she will learn. Don't be surprised if you need two spoons per meal - one for your child and one for you!

Equipment

Be sure to supply the proper equipment: a high chair, a spoon with a bowl small enough to fit the baby's mouth and a handle short enough for the baby to control. To save time from cleaning up floors from spills is to purchase an unbreakable cup with two handles and a weighted bottom. Speaking of floors, you may want to use newspapers or a plastic tablecloth under the high chair to save you the three-times-a-day cleanup.



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Food portions

A child needs far less food than many parents expect. A child eats when hungry, and will take just what is needed to maintain the proper growth rate. Servings should be small and to avoid discouragement so should the plates and bowls. Add new foods gradually. If your child should reject a particular food, return to a favorite and offer the new food again in a few days. It isn't always easy to respect your child's strong food dislikes, but it is important to try. Don't fret! Don't nag!

Food Likes and Dislikes

At around one year of age, your child's appetite will decrease because the growth spurt of that first year slows down. Despite knowing this, it still comes as a surprise when children refuse to eat or finish foods they enjoyed or wolfed down just the week or months before. Toddlers change their food likes from day to day and meal to meal, so remember to offer old favorites and previously refused foods from time to time. Some Children cling to the personal service of being fed, but ultimately (given the opportunity) they all learn to feed themselves.

CAUTION

There are some finger foods that are NOT recommended for babies younger than 12 - 18 months old. Most of these foods should be avoided because they are difficult for a baby to digest and may lead to gagging or choking.

Difficult to Digest:

- Bacon Rind
- Baked Beans
- Chocolate
- Corn Cucumbers
- Leafy vegetables
- Onion, uncooked

May Cause Gagging:

- Hot dogs, whole
- Grapes, whole
- Hard candies
- Ice cubes
- Nuts and raisins
- Olives
- Popcorn

Serve toast sticks, bread sticks and raw carrot sticks with caution to very young children. Also, peanut butter should be used sparingly or thinned with milk for very young children so it will not stick in the back of the mouth and cause gagging.

Nuts and popcorn are not recommended even for older toddlers! Some children are more susceptible to gagging than others but all children have smaller airways and weaker gag reflexes than adults.

Finger foods should be eaten only when your child is sitting up and under adult supervisions. [Food should never be eaten while running or lying down] Now that you know what specific finger foods to avoid and serve with care, here are several lists of ideas for foods that children can handle as they grow older.

Appropriate finger foods: 6 - 8 months

- Applesauce
- Bananas, mashed or in small slices
- Canned pears and peaches
- Cheerios - be careful!
- Chicken liver and other tender meat, mashed or chopped
- Cooked cereals
- Cottage cheese
- Graham crackers
- Ground meat (may or may not be accepted)
- Potatoes, mashed
- Pudding
- Soft-cooked vegetables, mashed
- Toast, lightly buttered
- Vanilla ice cream
- Yogurt, frozen or regular



Appropriate finger foods: 9 -12 months

Texture becomes of great interest at this point. Most babies with two to four teeth are receptive to lumpier foods. Regardless of age, babies do not need teeth to chew; gums do an adequate job on soft foods. Chewier fruits and vegetables should be added as more teeth erupt. It is easy to drift into the habit of serving only soft fruits and vegetables, but it is wise to gradually increase the chewy foods as your babies chewing ability increases.

- Bagel, Soft
- Carrots and other vegetables, cooked soft
- Cheeses, soft
- Chicken, in cooked pieces
- Custards, soft
- Egg, boiled, scrambled or poached (yolks only , if your child is sensitive)
- Egg noodles
- Fish, without bones (also gefilte fish)
- Macaroni pasta
- Meatballs, tiny ones



- Meats, tender varieties of lamb, veal and beef
- Orange sections, peeled with loose membrane removed
- Peaches, ripe and peeled
- Rice
- Spaghetti with meat sauce
- Toast

Appropriate finger foods: 12 months and older

Vegetables

- Asparagus tips
- Avocado, ripe
- Broccoli tips
- Carrot sticks, preferably soft-cooked or grated
- Cauliflower
- Celery, with all strands removed
- Cherry tomatoes, halved
- French fires
- Green beans
- Lettuce, cut up
- Mushrooms
- Peas, uncooked and frozen ones too!



- Pickle spears
- Potatoes, mashed
- Sweet potato, cooked and mashed
- Tomatoes, peeled

Dairy

- Cottage Cheese (add fresh or canned fruit for interest)
- Deviled eggs made with mayonnaise
- Hard cooked eggs
- Small squares of soft cheese, such as American or Gouda
- Yogurt (may be served semi-frozen)



Continued: finger foods for 12 months and older

Fruit



Apples, peeled
 Banana, whole or cut into sections
 Blueberries
 Cantaloupe, cut into bite-size pieces
 Dried fruits
 Fruit cocktail, canned
 Grapes, halved for young toddlers
 Mandarin oranges, canned
 Navel oranges, peeled and sectioned
 Peaches, peeled
 Pears, peeled
 Strawberries, halved
 Sweet Cherries, pitted
 Watermelon, pitted and cut into bite-size pieces

Meats

* Bacon, crisp
 * Beef jerky
 Chicken or beef liver
 Chicken or turkey, diced
 * Frankfurters, fresh (see cautionary note)
 * Ham, cut into bite-size pieces
 Hamburger (try in different shapes like sticks)
 Lamb chops (a bone without sharp points)
 * Luncheon meats
 Meatballs, small ones
 Roasts, tender cuts (may grind)
 * Sausage
 Spareribs, well cooked
 Tuna Fish
 Turkey, ground and cooked like hamburger
 Veal
 * These meats contain sodium nitrites, which acts as preservatives and coloring agents. They should be served in moderation. Some experts question the nutritional safety of nitrites, but of even greater concern is the large amount of fat and cholesterol these foods add to a child's diet.

Cation - Since hot dogs have been the most common cause of food-related choking among children younger than two years old, monitor your child's consumption of them carefully. TIP - slice a hot dog lengthwise, turn, and slice lengthwise again before serving alone or on a bun.

Breads, Cereals and other Grains

Arrowroot cookies
 Bagel and cream cheese
 Bran muffins, slightly frozen
 Cereals, cold (dry or with milk)
 Cereals, hot (regular or instant)
 Graham crackers
 Macaroni, cooked (a variety of shapes)
 Oyster crackers
 Pretzel rods (minus excess salt)
 Saltines
 Sandwiches, broken into small pieces
 Spaghetti, cooked
 Spinach noodles (those green ones)
 Toast, lightly buttered and cut into fourths
 Triscuits
 Zwieback

Avoid those ready-to-eat cereals that are sugar-frosted, honey-coated or chocolate flavored. They add more unnecessary sugars to your child's diet.

Concluding Thoughts

As your child's ability with a spoon increases, so should the variety of bowl-type food you serve. Be patient and try not to let the lack of neatness dissuade you from letting your child continue to practice.

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