

How to Make Your Own Baby Food

Making your baby's first solid food does not have to be a big ordeal. It's really not as complicated as it may at first seem. The benefit to making fresh food for your tiny person is that you do not have to worry about preservatives or unlisted intentional or unintentional ingredients contaminating your baby's first real food. Additionally, you are able to customize how smooth or chunky you want your baby's food to be.

Grocery Shopping

Before any cooking can commence, you will need to make a trip to the grocery store to purchase food for your baby. I personally wanted to feed my daughter organic food as much as possible during her first year of life. I quickly developed a habit of making a special bi-weekly grocery shopping trip to purchase produce and other organic items specifically for my daughter's meals.

As for how much food to buy, to some extent, you will just have to figure this out as you begin to gauge how much food your baby is interested in consuming. Every little eater is different. My daughter ate pretty well but I would not call her a big eater.

By the time she was getting more used to solids, I was purchasing \$60-\$80 worth of food for her every couple of weeks. However, she was not consuming all of this food by herself. I frequently shared and finished her meals.

Produce

To get an idea of what and how much produce I purchased every couple of weeks, this is what my typical shopping list looked like (usually all organic):

Produce:

- Apples - 1 lb bag
- Pears - 4
- Mango - 2-3
- Bananas - 1 bunch

- Avocados - 4-6
- Yellow Squash - 10
- Zucchini - 10
- Onion - 1 large
- Carrots - 1 lb bag
- Beats - 3 small or 1 large and 1 small
- Leafy Greens - 1-2 bunches
- Sweet Potatoes - 2 lbs

I know this looks like a lot of food for a tiny baby. And it is! But I wanted to provide her with a variety of nutrients and options, and I knew I would eat anything she did not eat. This is a great way to get more fruits and veggies into your own diet, Mama!

Proteins & Whole Grains

Once we got a few months into solids, I also offered her organic proteins and whole grains. The following were typical items I kept on hand in addition to fresh produce:

Proteins:

- Organic, creamy, no added sugar or salt peanut butter
- Organic, no added sugar or salt almond butter
- Organic legumes (black beans, kidney beans, garbonzo beans, black eyed peas, lentils)

Whole Grains:

- Organic old fashioned oats
- Organic brown rice
- Organic quinoa (also a protein)
- Homemade whole wheat bread

"Making" Baby Food

I say "making" baby food with quotation marks because I don't really consider what I did to be making anything. Because I wanted my daughter to be able to pick up her own food, I did not usually puree her foods. This made preparing baby food really simple.

There are some yummy looking recipes out there for pureeing certain foods together, and if you are up for it, have an appropriate appliance and want to do that, that is great! Personally, I just wanted it to be easy for me and fun for my daughter.

Also, please note that I was making food for a reflux baby who choked and gagged very easily and often, so I cooked everything extremely soft and mushy. If you have a reflux baby, you might find this to be a great way of preparing food, but if your baby does not have reflux, he may be able to handle tougher textures sooner.

So, using the grocery shopping list above, here is how I prepared my baby's first solid foods:

Fruits & Veggies

Apples & Pears:

Wash, cut into slices and steam until extremely soft. Easily peel off the skin once cooled.

Mangos:

Wash, poke holes in the skin and steam until soft. Once cooled, cut open and scoop the flesh out of the skin and off of the core.

Bananas & Avocados:

Use when very ripe but not yet going brown inside. Wash, peel and mash well with a fork. Add breastmilk or formula to create a thinner consistency to start if you want.

Yellow Squash & Zucchini:

Wash, cut ends off then cut into 3 chunks. Steam until very soft. Once cooled, remove skins.

Onions:

Wash, cut ends off and remove skin. Steam until very soft. Puree for younger babies or chop fine for older babies.

Carrots:

Wash, chop off ends and peel. Chop into chunks. Steam until very soft/mushy.

Beats:

Wash well and steam until soft (these won't get super soft). Once cooled, peel away skin and cut/mash fine with a fork.

Leafy Greens:

Wash well and steam until completely wilted (some greens will wilt more than others). For greens with thick, hard stems that do not soften during cooking, remove only the leaves for baby to eat and chop extremely fine or puree.

Sweet Potatos:

Wash well and steam until very soft. Once cooled, remove skin and mash or cut into mushy large chunks (at least an inch in size).

Proteins

Peanut Butter & Almond Butter:

Spread a very thin layer onto well-cooked apple or pear slices or very-ripe chunks of banana. Alternatively, mix a small amount into some well-cooked oatmeal or quinoa.

Legumes:

Rinse well and boil until soft and mashable. Mash or cut into fine pieces your baby will not have to work hard to chew. Cook in mild spices such as black pepper, coriander or garlic powder for some extra flavor.

Whole Grains

Oatmeal:

Cook in water or breastmilk until very soggy and soft. Mix in some banana or cook with apple, pear or berries. Add a dash of cinnamon for some spice.

Brown Rice:

Rinse well and boil until completely soft and mushy. Strain and rinse. Offer with veggies and/or legumes.

Quinoa:

Rinse with a fine mesh strainer. Boil 1 part quinoa with 2 parts water for 15 minutes. After 15 minutes of boiling, allow any excess water to be cooked out and scrape into a bowl to prevent burning. Cook with garlic powder and fresh or dried herbs to add flavor. Alternatively, cook in leftover vegetable water from steamed veggies for extra flavor and nutrition.

Homemade Whole Wheat Bread:

Follow any simple bread recipe containing only whole wheat flour, yeast, water and minimal salt. Do not use baking powder or baking soda and omit or cut down on sugar for feeding the yeast. Once baked, briefly run a piece of bread under water to soften it up for an older baby to chew.

Storing Baby Food

Keep in mind that once you cook a food, it is only good in the fridge for 48 hours for your baby in order to protect her from getting any harmful bacteria into her sensitive digestive system. Once it is cooked, store it in any food storage container with an airtight lid - glass is best. Once a food is 48 hours old, eat it up yourself to avoid waste since the food is still safe for adults to eat.

The relatively short fridge-life of baby food is partly why I purchased so much food for my little one. In order to ensure that I had enough food and several options for my daughter each day, I usually cooked 2-3 different types of produce that looked like enough to last her 2 days even if she didn't like all of the options. However, the natural result of this is that there were sometimes quite a few left-overs, which I happily consumed.

I hope this guide has helped simplify the idea of "making" your own baby food as you prepare to start your baby on solids. I know it can be overwhelming learning how to start solids with your baby, but it will become second nature once you get into the groove of this exciting new stage.