



Ten ideas for finger foods for babies and toddlers

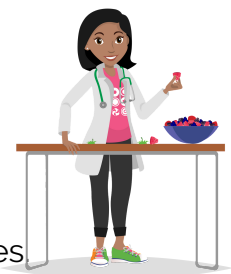
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If you are JUST getting started with solid foods make sure to visit our post, "Getting Started Feeding and Making your Own Baby Food." Parents often wonder what to give their babies and toddlers when they get tired of the baby "mush". Babies quickly get bored with bland, overly smooth baby food and are ready to try more texture and more tastes. More importantly, they are ready to feed THEMSELVES. Finger foods are a great way for babies to learn independence, develop their fine motor skills, and try a variety of more grown-up tastes and textures. Now that your baby eats finger foods, they don't need their own "special food." Half or more of foods marketed to babies and toddlers have added sugar, even though added sugar is not recommended until after age 2. Many parents offer finger foods like crackers, puffs, yogurt snacks, and fruit-flavored snacks because without knowing they may be too high in salt, sugar, and fat. Instead, we like to teach families the idea of "One Meal, One Family" which helps babies eat the healthy food that YOU eat and hopefully will simplify meal planning. Visit doctoryum.org and see the family recipes listed under the "baby food" tag.

Here are six tips for starting finger foods:

1. Be creative: "Grownup" foods like hummus and tofu can be really nutritious for babies and get them used to a variety of tastes and textures



2. Don't be afraid to add seasonings: Although salt and extra sugar is not necessary, try lightly seasoning foods with cinnamon, pepper, curry, garlic powder, fresh or dried herbs. These tastes will get them used to new flavors and lay the foundation for an adventurous eater.

3. Offer a variety of foods: They may not eat everything you offer, but you might be surprised at what they like. Try not to let your own preferences prevent you from offering foods to your baby. You may be surprised when your baby likes foods that you may not enjoy.

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4. Repeat, repeat, repeat: Multiple exposures to food are often necessary for children to develop a liking for a new food (in many cases, 12-15 times!) Try blending a food that a child doesn't like with another food they like to get them used to it.

5. Offer safe foods: Make sure that foods are safe and are not a choking hazard. Hard foods like nuts and dried fruits should be avoided, and fruit with a membrane or peel like oranges, cherry tomatoes, and grapes should be cut into halves lengthwise or quarters.

6. Supervise: Always supervise new eaters when they are eating finger foods, even foods they are used to.

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(see doctoryum.org for recipes)

1. Diced fruits: As you feed one meal for the whole family, our "Rainbow Fruit Salad" is a great way for your baby to try the fruits that you are also enjoying. Try a variety of fruits like peaches, pears, bananas, mangoes, melons, and kiwi. Slightly overripe fruit will be softer and easier to chew. Try rolling them in wheat germ or ground-up cereal to make it easier to pick up. Try slicing fruit into cubes or other fun shapes. Try buying seasonal fruit which is generally tastier and more nutritious.

2. Soft cooked vegetables and beans: Carrots, broccoli, cauliflower, string beans, and other veggies are great foods for babies when cooked. Cook in a few inches of water to steam/boil. Cut into small bite-sized pieces. To get some protein into your day, try some of our recipes like our "Quick Black Beans" or our "Chickpea Curry" which also have tons of flavor for your new eater to enjoy.

3. Veggie nuggets: Instead of relying on frozen chicken nuggets, try making up a batch of veggie nuggets like our "Broc and Cara Treats" and our "Cauliflower Tots." Kids will love to dip these in their favorite flavors.

4. Rice Balls: Cook brown rice until very soft. Mix with lentils, a little bit of vegetable soup, smashed beans, or avocado and form into 3/4 inch balls that are easy to pick up. Lentils and rice together make a very nutritious combination. See my recipe for "Rice Balls with Lentils".





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5. Ground Meat and Fish: Take ground beef or turkey, add in other sautéed veggies, and form into small balls. Once baked you can cut into even smaller bites. See our recipe for "Very Veggie Meatloaf" Offer a tomato sauce or applesauce for dipping. Try our "Fin-tastic Fish Sticks" which has a super healthy breading and makes a great finger food. For a vegetarian option dice extra firm tofu into small bites and roast at 375 degrees until slightly browned and a bit more dry. This will make it easy to pick up and even dip in other flavors.

6. Eggs: Eggs are a great "vehicle for vegetables." Add spinach, grated carrots, or other small cooked veggies. Try our "Super Egg Scramble". Cook up your favorite veggies and make our "Friteeni Frittatas" which can even be reheated for the next day. There is new research about the advantages of offering high allergen foods like egg and peanut to infants, but if you have a family history of egg allergies talk to your pediatrician about how to safely introduce eggs to your baby.

7. Pasta: Noodles of all types can be made with mild sauces and added veggies. Soft pasta in different shapes like bow-ties can be great finger food. See our recipes like, "Butternut Squash Mac and Cheese" or "Avocado Mac and Cheese" which has a lot of healthy fats for growing babies. How about giving your "baby foodie" a delicious "Gnocchi with Butternut Squash and Kale!"

8. Healthy muffins and bread: Muffins made with whole grains and added ingredients like flax and wheat germ can be a great way to get extra fiber and nutrients into the diet. Cut into small bites or cubes. See my recipe for "Pumpkin Breakfast Muffins" or for a gluten-free version try "Pumpkin Apple Flax Muffins." Toast a slice of whole grain bread, add a spread like yogurt or hummus, and cut into strips that are easy to hold.

9. Hummus: This a great dip for other finger foods like vegetables and crackers. Use it as a spread on toast to and cut into fun shapes. Try different varieties like "Edamame Hummus" or "Green Hummus."

10. Sweet Potatoes: In addition to a smashed baby food version like our "Mashed Potatoes and More," diced or cut into strips and roast lightly with a spray of olive oil until softened.

Remember that feeding is a developmental process and finger foods can help babies to practice fine motor skills and chewing and swallowing textured foods. To learn more about feeding development and how to help raise an adventurous eater from birth to school age, check out my book, "Raising a Healthy, Happy Eater" co-authored with feeding specialist Melanie Potock.

