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A PUBLICATION OF

WESTCHESTER

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# Homemade Baby Food

## *It's Easier Than You Think!*

*By Jean Sheff*

As a nutritionist Tina Ruggiero, M.S., R.D., L.D., is familiar with the general reaction to her suggestion that parents make their infant's food. "They recoil," she says with a chuckle. They say they are working parents, have a busy household, have another child, don't know how to cook and myriad other reasons why making baby food from scratch is out of the question.

Undaunted, Ruggiero, a nutrition correspondent for NBC's syndicated television show, *Daytime*, blogger at [www.voiceofreason.net](http://www.voiceofreason.net) and author of *The Best Homemade Baby Food on the Planet* (2010, Fair Winds Press), explains that making homemade baby food requires no skill, little time and practically no investment.

### **First Bites**

Most babies are ready to start experimenting with solid food at

about 6 months old. Preparing the meals should be kept simple. You don't even need much equipment. "A fork, spoon and blender is all you will need," says Ruggiero. Add a baby feeding cup and spoon and you are outfitted for the first meal. "At this age babies have no teeth, the food should be soft, almost soupy," says Ruggiero.

Many parents are surprised to learn that a meal at this age consists of a tablespoon or two of food. She suggests parents introduce a single new food every couple of days. Introducing food in this way allows parents to watch for any adverse reactions such as diarrhea, rash, nausea or reflux.

First foods can include sweet potato, peas, apple, pear, avocado, banana or brown rice cereal. And while she says organic ingredients aren't absolutely necessary, Ruggiero suggests parents purchase the best ingredients they can afford.

If baby refuses a food it's fine. "There should be no drama at mealtime," says Ruggiero. "A baby can feed off negative energy, so stay calm and introduce the food again in a few days or even a few months. There's a good chance that baby will eat it at a later date."

## Food Safety

She does encourage parents to follow safe food preparation and storage procedures. "It's important to thoroughly wash your hands before handling food, wash all cutting boards, wash and peel all vegetables and then rinse them again, cook foods to the proper temperature and once a spoon has touched the food in a bowl discard all the leftover food. Putting just a tablespoon or two of food in the dish at a time helps avoid waste.

Ruggiero also cautions parents to consistently check the temperature of food before serving it to baby. She supports microwave use for ease, but reminds parents to heat foods in a glass dish with a glass lid and to

avoid plastic wrap or plastic containers in the heating process.

## Easy Does It

Ruggiero's book contains more than 200 nutritious, easy-to-make baby food recipes. She suggests that parents cook in batches and then freeze the food in covered ice cube trays (each cube equals about 1 ounce of food). Pop out individual "ice cube meals" and reheat for easy feeding. "Root vegetables tend to freeze best," says Ruggiero. She recommends freezing purée of butternut squash, zucchini, sweet potato and carrots.

Ruggiero says it's important to date and label all frozen food. "It is safe to use frozen foods from four to six weeks from the date of freezing," she says.

And for those parents who believe commercially prepared baby food is cheaper, Ruggiero says she did the math and it's not so. Four ounces of prepared baby food carrots can cost 50 cents, that's 12.5 cents per ounce. A 32 ounce bag of carrots can cost \$2, or 6.25 cents per ounce. "Over a year the cost savings can be significant," says Ruggiero. And you know exactly what your little one is eating – fresh, natural food.

## An Adventure

Just as important, says Ruggiero, is to bring all your patience and calm to the feeding process. "This should be a fun and enjoyable experience, it's a huge adventure for baby," she says. "Remember baby is being introduced to strange new textures and mouth feels, as adults we sometimes take this for granted." Baby needs time to adjust to the solid food. "Preparing and offering your infant homemade baby food is an important way to start your baby off on a lifetime of health," says Ruggiero. ♦

**Jean Sheff is editor of *Baby* and *Westchester Family*.**