

# Finger Foods

## What is finger feeding?

Finger feeding is an important step in your baby's growth and development. It teaches them to eat on their own and promotes positive feeding experiences by giving them independence and control during meal and snack times.

Meal and snack times are not only a time to provide your baby with nutrition, but are also a time to learn. These are times when your baby can explore new and interesting textures, taste new foods, practice hand-to-mouth coordination, and develop finger strength and dexterity.



## When can I start to introduce finger foods?

Most babies are ready to start to feed themselves some finger foods by about 6 months old. Your baby is ready for finger foods when they can sit securely in a highchair and are able to pick toys up and bring them to their mouth.

If your baby is slouching in the highchair and cannot reach, grasp, and place toys in their mouth, they may not be ready to start finger feeding. Instead, do more tummy time and play in a side lying position to strengthen their tummy muscles.



## How do I start to introduce finger foods?

- Start with foods that are large enough for your baby to grab.
- Choose foods that become soft in the mouth and that your baby can chew or gum easily. Your baby does not need teeth to start finger foods!
- Finger foods can be family foods cut up into smaller pieces. This allows your baby to be a part of family meals.

*For example:*

At age...	You can start to introduce...
6 months	Soft foods, cut into 2-fingers long, 1-finger wide strips, that baby can pick up with their whole hand.
9 months	Soft foods, cut into 1-inch cubes, that baby can pick up with their fingers.
See pages 3 and 4 for examples of finger foods.	

## But, it gets *messy*! What should I do?

Expect a mess when your baby is learning to finger feed. It is normal for them to drop food on the floor as they learn to feed themselves. You may be tempted to give your baby lots of help to make the meal tidier and quicker, but allow them to practice this new skill on their own. **Mess is so good during meal time!**

- Wait until after the meal to clean your child's hands and face.
- Make sure your child is sitting upright in a highchair - this is the safest place for your child to eat and can help prevent choking.
- If they are really messy, it may be helpful to feed them without clothes on when they are first starting to finger feed.
- Sit and eat your meals and snacks at the same time. Setting a good example is one of the best ways to teach them how to feed themselves and what healthy eating habits are.



## What if my baby gags or spits food out?

Gagging is not choking! Gagging is a safe and normal reaction when starting self-feeding and exploring new foods. It is the body learning new foods and textures. As your baby continues to feed themselves, gagging tends to go away. Do not react when your baby gags. Calmly allow them to continue eating.

Spitting out food is also normal as your baby learns how to move new foods around in their mouth. Allow your baby to spit foods out. With more and more practice self-feeding, they will learn how to keep the foods in their mouth.

### Differences Between Gagging and Choking

Gagging	Choking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No colour change to baby's lips or face</li><li>• Baby is making sounds</li><li>• Baby may cough out food</li><li>• Baby will often continue with activity</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Baby's lips or face may change to blue/gray colour</li><li>• Baby will not be making sounds</li><li>• Baby may often look startled and bring their hands to their neck or face</li><li>• Baby will often stop what they are doing</li></ul>

## What finger foods can I offer my baby?

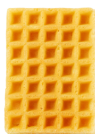
### Vegetables & Fruits

- Ripe banana, peach, kiwi, mango, papaya, melon, or avocado
- Apple or pear, unsweetened from a can or cooked soft and peeled
- Cooked or steamed carrot, sliced length-wise; sweet potato, broccoli
- Baked vegetable sticks (carrots, yam, sweet potato, zucchini)
- French fries, sweet potato fries
- Ripe avocado cubes



### Whole Grain Products

- Dry whole wheat toast sticks, roti, chapatti, or pita
- Unsalted whole grain crackers
- Cooked macaroni, pasta, or rice, macaroni and cheese
- O-shaped cereal, such as Cheerios® or Nutrios®
- Cereal biscuits such as Farley Biscuit® or Baby Mum Mum®, Digestive Cookies, Arrowroot cookies
- Pieces of matzo ball
- Mini muffins
- Pieces of pancakes or waffles
- French toast cut into slices (bread dipped in a beaten egg and then fried)
- Grilled cheese sandwiches, cut into thin slices
- Mini toasted Bagels



### Calcium-Rich Foods

- Grated cheese



### Iron-Rich Foods

- Cooked ground chicken, beef or pork, mini meatball, meatloaf
- Cooked or canned flaked fish
- Cooked or canned beans or lentils
- Chopped hard-cooked eggs, scrambled eggs
- Tofu cubes
- Fish sticks
- Baked chicken nuggets
- Baked beans
- Mini omelettes or quiche



### Tip!

Letting your baby play with hard munchables (such as a rib bone or a mango pit) can help them develop their oral motor skills, reduce gagging over time, and allow them to use all their senses to explore and experience food.



## What finger foods can I offer my toddler (from 12 to 24 months of age)?

Toddlers love to be independent. Letting children feed themselves allows them to take control of their eating. Finger feeding is a great way to get a child to eat more variety. You can try any of the finger food ideas for baby or the additional options below.

### Vegetables & Fruits

- Thin slices of fruit, such as apple, pear, or avocado
- Raspberries or sliced strawberries
- Mandarin orange sections
- Grapes cut in half (or cut into quarters, if grapes are large)
- Thin strips of soft raw vegetables, peeled, such as cucumber or tomato
- Cooked vegetables, such as broccoli, carrot, potato, or cauliflower



### Iron-Rich Foods

- Meat cut in cubes or strips (stewed meat is more moist and may be easier to chew)
- Small pieces of meat loaf or mini meatballs
- Homemade chicken fingers, nuggets, or fish sticks
- Flaked tuna or salmon
- Cooked or canned kidney or white beans
- Pieces of scrambled eggs or omelette



### Whole Grain Products

- Whole wheat toast, cut into fun shapes with a cookie cutter
- Dry cereal, such as Corn Bran® or Shreddies®
- A sandwich, cut into quarters
- Pancakes, using whole grain flour, cut into quarters



### Calcium-Rich Foods

- Cheese cubes, such as mozzarella, Swiss, or cheddar



### For more information, please contact:

#### Humber River Health Maternal and Child Program

Web: <http://www.hrh.ca>

#### Paediatric Outpatient Clinic

Tel: (416) 242-1000 ext. 21400

#### UnlockFood.ca

Web: <http://www.unlockfood.ca>

Tel: 8-1-1 (via Health811)

#### Health Canada

Tel: (613) 957-2991 / Toll-free: 1 (866) 225-0709

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