



Raise a Foodie

Starting solids is an adventure for today's babies.

With so many new ways to add nutrients, variety, and flavor to your petite gourmand's plate, you can begin now to instill a love of healthy food for life.

LYSS STERN, a New York City mom, never gave much thought to baby food for her two oldest kids. "No one talked about quality or taste then. You just fed them what was in the store," she says. And what was in the store was, well, boring and bland.

Today's new parents are changing that. You've seen *Top Chef*. You know what molecular gastronomy is (or at least you've heard of it). You've shelved the white bread and helped make kale and quinoa culinary stars. As a result, you're elevating baby food to the next level. "Parents are seeking—and demanding—variety, healthier options, and fewer rules," says Amy Bentley, Ph.D., author of *Inventing Baby Food*. Mealtime for Stern's third child, Blake, features

a completely different menu. "I want Blake to eat healthy, like the rest of the family," she notes. Bring these top trends to your little one's high chair.

I You Can Feed Baby Anything!

"I fed Cameron kohlrabi once," says Randi Hecht, laughing about the turnip-like vegetable. "He didn't love it. But I want Cameron to try as many fresh foods as possible—even ones I don't like," adds the Brooklyn, New York, mom. The "I'll puree anything" attitude is not unusual. Around one third of all baby food consumed is now homemade. "Parents want to provide organic,

fresh, and additive- or GMO-free food. Homemade can help meet that benchmark," notes Jenna Helwig, the food editor of *AB's* sister magazine, *Parents*, and author of *Real Baby Food*. Plus, research shows that infants who eat a diet that is high in vegetables, fruits, and home-prepared foods have fewer food allergies by age 2.

The DIY approach has spawned baby-food-making classes offered by Helwig and countless others. And for busy parents who can afford it, there's the option of outsourcing. "I don't have the time, energy, or desire to peel, cube, steam, and puree," says Leanne Chabalko, of San Francisco. So Chabalko found a local company that makes and delivers fresh, organic, farm-to-baby foods weekly.

by **HOLLY PEVZNER** • photographs by **MARLEY KATE**

Get ready to rock
his taste buds!





New flavor combos debut almost daily.

2 | Store-Bought Has Grown Up

The homemade wave has spurred baby-food manufacturers to up their game, which was a big relief for Atlanta mom Sandi Angotti. “I spent hours making baby food for my son, Teo, and he hardly ate any of it. He loved jarred food instead! It was humbling, but I was grateful that there were so many options out there,” she notes. At grocery stores you’ll now find inspiring choices, such as Beech-Nut’s Beets, Pear, and Pomegranate; Sprout’s Carrot, Mango, and Coconut with Red Lentils; and Gerber’s Organic Fruit and Grain Banana Acai Granola.

“We know people don’t have things like ascorbic acid in their spice rack, so we took it out of our new naturals and organic lines,” says Andy Dahlen, vice president of marketing and sales at Beech-Nut. “We want moms

to recognize every ingredient.” To help get to that place, companies like Beech-Nut and Sprout are revamping their cooking methods to minimize or eliminate preservatives.

While the ingredient list has been simplified, there are still plenty of flavorful options. “Jarred food makes it possible for you to expose your child to a wide variety of fruits, veggies, and grains that you may not always have on hand,” notes Dr. Bentley. It seems easier, after all, to buy baby food with pomegranate or pineapple in it than to transform the fresh ingredients into baby food.

3 | More Spice, Please!

We’re all much more familiar with globally inspired flavors thanks to the proliferation of new restaurants, food blogs, Pinterest, Instagram, and cooking shows. And you don’t

have to go to specialty shops to find so-called exotic ingredients. They’re now in the supermarket, including the baby food aisle. “We know that exposing babies to more flavors sets them up to be adventurous eaters,” says Maryann Jacobsen, R.D., coauthor of *Fearless Feeding*.

If you dined on enchiladas, curry, or gumbo while pregnant or nursing, your baby has already tasted spicy eats. “Babies get acclimated to flavors they experience in utero and in breast milk,” says Dr. Bentley.

“I loved using ground spices, fresh herbs, tomato paste, and Parmesan cheese to add interest to my daughter’s first bites,” says Helwig. Some of her favorite flavor kicks for purees include adding ground ginger to applesauce; cumin to sweet potatoes or carrots; turmeric to cauliflower; and coriander to pears.

Melissa Gordy, of Pasadena, California, added roasted garlic or chili powder to her daughter Olivia’s first foods. “Soon enough she was eating an array of Thai and Indian spices, and loved it,” notes Gordy.

You don’t have to DIY to get around-the-world taste. Plum Organics, for instance, has a World Baby line featuring flavors of Italy, Mexico, Thailand, and Morocco.

4 | Food Fads Are for Baby Too

“For generations, rice cereal was the go-to first baby food because it’s easy to digest and has a low allergy risk,” notes Dr. Bentley. Parents today aren’t buying it, however. “I didn’t bother with rice cereal,” says Danielle Faust, of Loxahatchee, Florida. “My husband and I eat whole grains, so we figured, why not make them for our babies too?”

Enter quinoa (a favorite of the Faust kids), amaranth, kamut, barley, buckwheat, chia, and other ancient grains. Unlike with processed rice



A future discerning diner here!

cereal, none of the vitamins, minerals, fiber, healthy fats, or phytochemicals have been stripped away in these grains. And some, like quinoa and amaranth, are also protein-rich. Popular picks on the supermarket shelves: Happy Baby's Multi-Grain Baby Cereal with Oats, Amaranth, and Quinoa; Earth's Best's Organic Apple Plum Kamut puree; NuturMe's Organic Quinoa Baby Cereal; and Plum Organics' Sweet Potato, Mango, and Millet.

Another grown-up trend that has landed on baby spoons is Greek yogurt. "The live, active cultures

in it help with the development of good bacteria in your baby's gut, which promotes digestive health in the first two years," says Jacobsen. While there are a lot of just-for-baby choices out there, Jacobsen says that flavored yogurts (Greek and regular) are often packed with added sugar, so she recommends plain yogurt instead. Most babies can start eating the plain, whole-fat variety when they start solids at about 6 months. If your munchkin rejects it at first, sweeten the yogurt slightly with maple syrup or fruit. (Avoid honey until after age 1; it can cause botulism in infants.)

You've traded processed white bread and rice for whole grains, so pass the quinoa to Baby.

5 | It's Okay to Go Meatless

More than a third of all people are cutting back on meat, according to a recent survey by the Meatless Monday campaign, and that translates to Baby's plate too. Amy Kendall, of Orem, Utah, was wary of pureed meat in baby food. "I didn't know what the cut was. And were there hormones in it?" she wondered. In fact, there's actually no real need for infants to eat meat. Both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics note that a well-planned vegetarian diet that's monitored by a physician can be healthy for little guys. "One of the reasons people like to offer meat is because of the protein, but protein is not a concern for infants who are consuming breast milk or formula," notes Jacobsen.

Getting enough iron on a meatless diet, however, can be a challenge. Serve Baby plenty of lentils, beans, tofu, and iron-fortified cereal. "Ask your pediatrician if your baby should get a routine blood test to check iron levels," suggests Rachel Meltzer Warren, R.D., author of *The Smart Girl's Guide to Going Vegetarian*. Most pediatricians will test a child's iron levels at around 6 to 12 months of age, or at other times if a parent is concerned. Some of the protein- and nutrient-packed non-meat options: Ella's Kitchen's Hugely Hearty Four Bean Feast with Big Flavor, Earth's Best's Organic Spinach Lentil Brown Rice, and Beech-Nut's Just Apple and Red Bean.

Whether you reach for a jar, or puree your farmers' market finds, there's little doubt that now is a good time to be seated in a high chair. "Moms have realized that there isn't any reason for babies to eat bland, boring, less nutritious food," says Helwig. And you'll be cultivating a mini-palate while you're at it. 🍴