

Chapter 7

Buying and Preparing Baby Foods

What's In This Chapter?

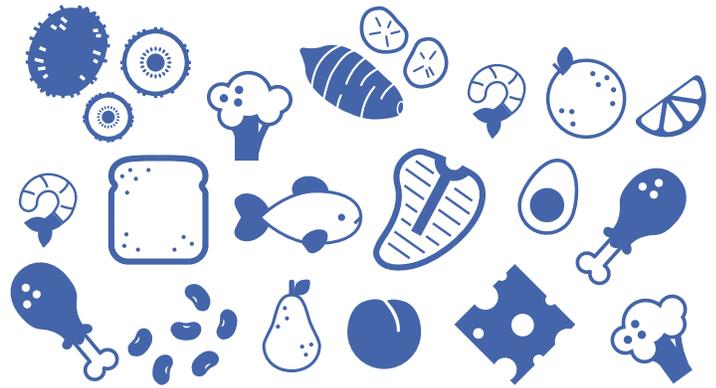
By the end of this chapter, child care providers will be able to:

- 1 Explain how to purchase and prepare creditable baby foods.
- 2 Identify equipment used to prepare baby foods.
- 3 Identify food safety tips for storing baby food.

Both **store-bought baby foods** and foods prepared at a **child care site** may be part of a **reimbursable meal** or snack in the **CACFP**.

Purchasing Baby Food

Many different store-bought baby foods are **creditable**. Water, broth, and vitamins (such as ascorbic acid) may be additional ingredients. These ingredients are added to make the food the right consistency for the baby and may be part of a creditable infant food. As a best practice, avoid choosing baby foods that have added sodium (salt), fat, and/or added sugars, like fruit juice concentrates or syrups. Foods high in added sodium, fat, and sugar are less healthful for the baby.



The following foods are creditable as part of a reimbursable infant meal or snack:

- Fruits (can include more than one kind of fruit)
- Vegetables (can include more than one kind of vegetable)
- Fruit and vegetable combinations
- Combination foods like meat or meat alternates with vegetable or fruit combinations
- Iron-fortified dry **infant cereal**
- Poultry (chicken or turkey)
- Meats (beef or pork)
- Meat alternates such as cheese and yogurt
- Fin fish and shellfish
- **Ready-to-eat cereals** (snack only)
- Breads (snack only)
- Crackers (snack only)

The following types of baby foods do not credit towards a reimbursable meal or snack:

- Grain-based desserts, such as cookies, puddings, brownies, etc.
- Fruit and yogurt products that do not meet the standard of identity for fat-free, low-fat, or whole milk yogurt^{6,7,8}
- Freeze-dried fruit and yogurt combinations

⁶Food and Drug Administration. 21 CFR 131.200. 1999.

⁷Food and Drug Administration. 21 CFR 131.203. 1999.

⁸Food and Drug Administration. 21 CFR 131.206. 1999.

Examples of Creditable Store-Bought Baby Foods



Ingredients: pears, zucchini, corn, water, vitamin c (ascorbic acid), citric acid



Ingredients: beef, beef broth



Ingredients: vegetables (carrots, re-hydrated potatoes, peas), water, finely ground chicken



Ingredients: sweet potatoes, water



Ingredients: pears, pear puree (water, pear puree concentrate), ascorbic acid (vitamin c), citric acid



Ingredients: water, butternut squash, chicken, corn, whole grain brown rice (non-creditable)

Examples of Non-Creditable Store-Bought Baby Foods



Ingredients: peach puree (water, peach puree concentrate), water, white grape juice concentrate, rice flour, ascorbic acid (vitamin c), cinnamon, citric acid



Ingredients: cultured organic grade a milk, organic skim milk, organic sugar, organic strawberry puree, organic tapioca starch, organic strawberry flavor (organic strawberry flavor, organic sugar, organic lemon juice concentrate), contains 2% or less of the following: organic whey protein concentrate, pectin, organic inulin, organic beet juice concentrate (for color), mixed tocopherols (to preserve freshness), probiotics (s. thermophilus, l. bulgaricus, l. acidophilus, b. lactic, l. paracasei, l. rhamnosus), contains milk

Selecting Baby Foods From the Store



Look at the "use by" date before buying baby foods.

When shopping for baby foods be sure to:

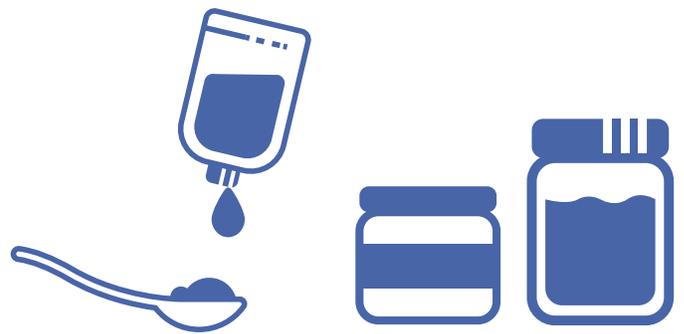
- look at the "use by" date on the food package before buying it. If the date has passed, do not buy or use the food.
- choose baby food containers that are clean. Do not buy or use dented, rusted, bulging, or leaking containers. The food in these containers may contain harmful bacteria or be unsafe.
- check that the vacuum seal has not been broken before using. You should hear a pop when you open the lid of the jar, or a cracking sound when you break the seal of the pouch or container.



The CACFP allows store-bought baby foods that are in a jar, container, or pouch.

Storing Opened Store-Bought Baby Food

- Observe “use by” dates for storage of unopened baby food containers. If the date has passed, throw out the food.
- After opening packaged baby food, label it with the date it was opened. Store any remaining food immediately in the refrigerator.



Baby Food Packaging

The CACFP allows store-bought baby foods that are packaged in a jar, plastic container, or pouch. The way the food is packaged does not impact whether a food is creditable or not. However, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry discourages the use of baby food pouches because if a baby sucks on the pouch for a long time, it may lead to **tooth decay**. If food pouches are used, squeeze the food onto a spoon to feed the baby or allow the baby to feed him or herself with the spoon.



Tip:

Baby foods and infant formulas served to **infants** containing healthy fats, such as docosahexaenoic (DHA), are creditable in the CACFP. “DHA” is usually written on the front of the food package if it is added. Some studies suggest that DHA may be good for a baby’s eye function and brain development.



You can prepare foods for babies at your child care site.

Preparing Baby Food at Your Child Care Site

You can prepare foods for babies at your child care site or purchase prepared foods from a vendor. There are many great reasons to prepare your own baby foods. Some are:

- You may be able to offer locally grown and seasonal foods as part of infant meals.
- It may be less expensive or easier for your child care site.
- You may be able to offer a greater variety of foods to the babies at your site.

For more information on how to prepare foods to avoid choking, see **Chapter 9: Choking Prevention on page 114.**



Tip:

For safety reasons, foods that are canned by a child care site are not allowed as part of a reimbursable meal or snack under the CACFP.

Did you know?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that homegrown spinach, beets, turnips, carrots, and collard greens made at home should not be fed to infants less than 6 months of age because they may contain nitrates. This can cause a condition which can make it harder for a baby's blood to carry oxygen throughout the body.

Tools for Preparing Baby Food

Common kitchen equipment is all that is needed to prepare baby food at your child care site. The following tools can help you **puree**, **mash**, grind, or finely chop foods for babies.



A blender can puree foods.

A food processor can puree, mash, or finely chop foods.



A fine mesh strainer changes the texture of the food when you push the food through the strainer with the back of a spoon.



A baby food grinder or food mill grinds and strains soft food pieces, leaving most skins and seeds behind.



A fork and knife can be used to mash or finely chop foods for babies. Foods should be no larger than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch or cut into thin slices to reduce the risk of choking.

Preparing and Cooking Food at Your Child Care Site

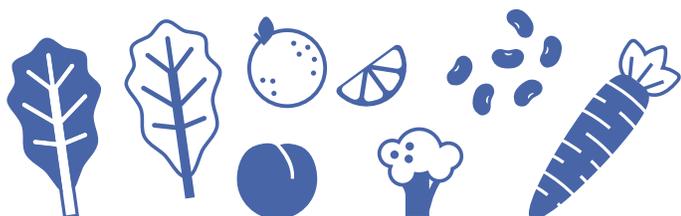


Examples of pureed vegetable baby food.

Vegetables and Fruits

Vegetables and fruits are great sources of nutrients, such as fiber and vitamin C, which promote healthy growth and development. Vegetables and fruits can be fresh, frozen, or canned, and prepared to the right texture for the baby. When possible, choose frozen vegetables and fruits without added salt, sauces, or fat; canned fruits without added sugar or syrup; and canned vegetables without added salt. Keep vegetables and fruits separate from raw meat, poultry, and fish in your shopping cart and in your refrigerator. Otherwise, the meat, poultry, and fish could drip juices and contaminate the other foods.

- Rinse fresh vegetables and fruits very well with clean running water to remove dirt and bacteria.
- Remove pits, seeds, skins, and tough peels from vegetables and fruits. Softer skins and peels can be removed either before or after cooking.
- To make the food softer, cook the vegetables or fruits. You can steam them using a steamer basket in a covered saucepan or in a microwave with a small amount of water.
- Vegetables and fruits can also be boiled in a small amount of water.
- After cooking, puree or mash food with leftover cooking liquid or water until it reaches the desired smoothness. If you are cooking for one baby, you can use breastmilk or infant formula to change the texture of the food. If you are preparing a large amount of baby food, it may be easier to use a blender or food processor.





Meat, Fish, Shellfish, and Poultry

Babies can be fed well-cooked, pureed meat, fish, shellfish, and poultry, which are great sources of iron and zinc.

- Purchase food from an approved source, such as a grocery store, food wholesaler, producer, or distributor.
- Always use a food thermometer when cooking meat, poultry, or fish to ensure that the foods are cooked to a safe temperature (see “**For Child Care Providers: Keeping Solid Foods Safe**” handout on **page 102**).
- Braising, stewing, or poaching works well for preparing soft meat.



Tip:

Home-caught fish is only creditable if it meets your State or local public health policies regarding food safety.

For food safety information, including information on using food thermometers, visit the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service website <https://www.fsis.usda.gov> or call the Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-888-MPHOTLINE (1-888-674-6854). You can also contact your health department with questions.

- After cooking, separate any remaining bone, skin, and pieces of fat.
- Cut the meat, poultry, shellfish, or fish into small pieces and puree, mash, or finely chop until you get the right texture. Add cooking liquid or water until you get the desired thickness. If you are cooking for one baby, you can use breastmilk or infant formula to change the texture of the food.
- Never deep-fat fry foods at your child care site. Deep-fat frying means cooking by fully covering (submerging) food in hot oil or other fat. Foods that are deep-fat fried on site cannot count toward a reimbursable meal in the CACFP.

Eggs

- Cook eggs well until the yolk and white are firm and not runny. Do not serve soft, runny eggs—these are undercooked and might contain bacteria that can make a baby sick. It is important to cook eggs fully to make sure they are safe to eat.
- Try serving hard-boiled eggs to babies. Eggs can be mixed with a bit of liquid, such as water and mashed to the desired texture. If you are cooking for one baby, you can use breastmilk or infant formula to change the texture.

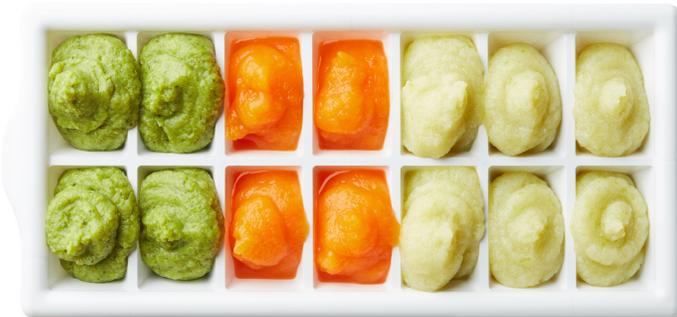
Dry Beans or Dry Peas

- To cook dry beans or peas, follow cooking instructions found on the package. It is not necessary to add seasonings, salt, or fat to the beans or peas. Make sure to cook the beans or peas until soft enough to puree or mash easily.
- If canned beans are used, drain the liquid and rinse the beans with water before pureeing or mashing. This helps to rinse off some of the sodium (salt). Add liquid to the beans if needed to reach the right texture.

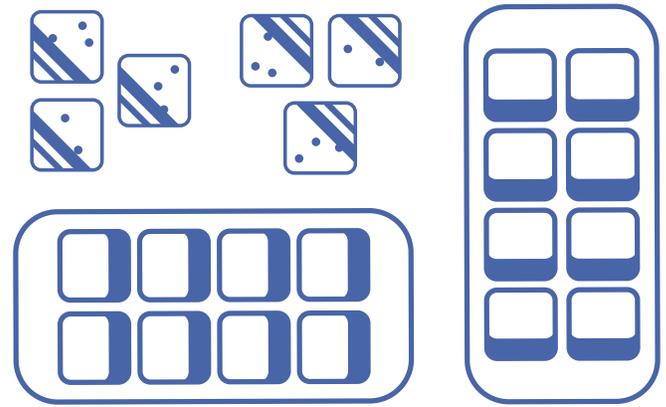
How To Freeze Foods

You can freeze prepared baby foods in a freezer with a temperature of 0 °F or colder. Here are some tips for freezing baby foods:

- Pour cooked, pureed, or mashed food into sections of a clean ice cube tray. Cover with plastic wrap, a lid, or aluminum foil. Place in the freezer. Once frozen, cubes can be stored in a container or plastic freezer bags. Each section of the tray holds about 2 tablespoons of food.
- Place 1–2 tablespoons of cooked, pureed food in separate spots on a clean baking sheet. Cover with plastic wrap or aluminum foil. Place in the freezer. Once frozen, food pieces can be stored in a freezer container or plastic freezer bag.
- Label and date bags or containers of frozen food. Use them within 1–2 months. When ready to use, remove the desired number of cubes or pieces with clean hands. Reheat thoroughly.



Cooked, pureed, or mashed food can be frozen using a clean ice cube tray.



Thawing and Reheating

- Thoroughly reheat refrigerated or frozen baby foods to 165 °F before feeding to a baby. Reheating kills any bacteria that may be present. Stir the food and make sure it is not too hot before feeding to the baby.
- Defrost frozen foods in the refrigerator or as part of the reheating process. Never defrost baby foods by leaving them at room temperature or in a bowl of standing water.
- Label the food with the date and time you removed it from the freezer. Use thawed food within 48 hours from the time it was removed from the freezer. Throw it out if it has been stored longer than 48 hours in the refrigerator.

Storing Solid Foods

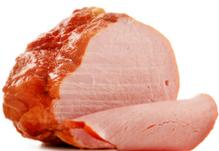
- Refrigerate hot foods in shallow containers.
- Cover the container after the food has cooled.
- Label the food with the date and time it was prepared.

In This Chapter

In this chapter, you have learned about how to safely buy and prepare foods for babies in your care. In the next chapter, you will learn about how to safely prepare food at your child care site.

For Child Care Providers: Keeping Solid Foods Safe

Cooking Solid Foods: Refer to the chart below for minimum cooking temperatures for each food.

Food	Temperature (using a food thermometer)
 <p>Fresh beef, pork, veal, lamb (steaks, roasts, chops)</p>	145 °F or 63 °C (with a 3-minute rest time)
 <p>Ground beef, pork, veal, lamb</p>	160 °F or 71 °C
 <p>Ground turkey, chicken</p>	165 °F or 74 °C
 <p>Fresh chicken, turkey (whole, breasts, thighs, legs, wings)</p>	165 °F or 74 °C
 <p>Fresh ham</p>	145 °F or 63 °C
 <p>Fish</p>	145 °F or 63 °C
 <p>Eggs and egg dishes</p>	160 °F or 71 °C Cook until yolk and white parts of the egg are firm.

Storing Solid Foods: Refer to the chart below for storing methods of different foods and the length of time they can be stored.

Solid Foods (store-bought or freshly made)	Refrigerator	Freezer
Vegetables and fruits	2–3 days	6–8 months
Meats and eggs	1 day	1–2 months
Meat/vegetable combinations	1–2 days	1–2 months
Freshly made baby foods	1–2 days	1–2 months



Avoid Spreading Harmful Bacteria to Other Food

To avoid spreading harmful bacteria to other foods:

- Do not allow raw or partially cooked meat, poultry, or fish, or their juices, to touch other foods. They should also not touch the surfaces, serving plates, or utensils used to serve or prepare other foods. For example, do not use a fork to test a piece of meat, poultry, or fish while cooking and then use the same fork to mix a cold vegetable dish.
- Use separate utensils and cutting boards for animal foods (such as meat, poultry, fish, and shellfish) and non-animal foods (such as vegetables, fruits, breads).
- Do not use cutting boards with crevices and cuts.
- Wash and sanitize utensils and boards after each use. Non-porous plastic cutting boards are best as they are easiest to clean.
- In the refrigerator, store raw or cooked meat, poultry, and fish below cooked or ready-to-eat foods so that no juices from those foods drip on other foods.

When taking the temperature of beef, pork, or lamb roasts, the food thermometer should be placed midway in the roast, avoiding the bone. When cooking hamburgers, steaks, or chops, insert a thermometer in the thickest part, away from bone, fat, or gristle.

A handout from *Feeding Infants in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*
<https://teamnutrition.usda.gov> • FNS 786H • March 2019
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If purchasing baby foods from the store, be sure to avoid dented, rusted, bulging, or leaking containers.



Both store-bought foods and foods prepared at the child care site or through a vendor can be part of a reimbursable meal in the CACFP. However, foods canned at home are not creditable and may not be offered.



Choose baby foods that do not contain added sugars, sodium (salt), and fat.



Never give honey to a baby under the age of 1 year or include it in a recipe when cooking.

Check Your Knowledge

1. A parent asks what to look for when buying store-bought baby food. You recommend:

- A** Look at “use by” dates.
- B** Find foods with unbroken seals.
- C** Do not buy baby food containers with dents, rust, or that are bulging or leaking.
- D** All of the above.

2. All of the following should be done while preparing food, *except*:

- A** Remove pits, seeds, skins, and tough peels from fruits and vegetables.
- B** Deep-fat fry chicken at your child care site.
- C** Remove all bones from fish.
- D** Cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm and not runny.

3. True or False? Blenders, food processors, fine mesh strainers, baby food grinders or mills, and a fork and knife are all good tools to use to change the texture of the food that you serve to a baby.

ANSWERS: 1. D • 2. B • 3. True