

# Baby Food Storage and Preparation

There is no mystery to safe baby food storage and preparation. These practical guidelines will help you serve only the very best meals to your discerning wee diner.

## Baby food storage and preparation – Hygiene in the kitchen

Cooking for baby is great fun, and by following a few basic hygiene rules, it's also perfectly safe.

Many parents worry about the food safety implications of cooking their own baby food. After all, we're constantly told that everything must be scrupulously sterilized, so we can become obsessed over these details. We worry over how best to sterilize the pots and pans we use to cook the food and whether or not we need to sterilize the utensils too!

But by the time your baby is starting on solid food – probably at around 6 months of age – he may already be picking his toys up from the floor and putting them into his mouth!

It was when we watched one of our children doing this very thing, that we realized you can't possibly keep everything in your baby's world sterile. We also came to the conclusion that we wouldn't want to. In fact, many medical professionals agree that our obsession with cleanliness can lead to a lowered immunity, making us more vulnerable to germs and disease.

Nevertheless, there ARE some simple, common sense guidelines that we need to follow to ensure the food we prepare for our baby is safe...

- Always wash your hands before you start. Yes, it sounds obvious, but so many of us forget to do it!
- Make sure you wash your pots, pans and utensils in hot, soapy water. Then air-dry them, instead of using a tea towel.
- Wash vegetables and fruit with cold, running water.
- Try to use separate cutting boards, one for “animal” products like meat and fish and another for fruits, vegetables and bread. If you only have one board, wash it when you switch from one food type to another. Plastic or glass boards are best – wooden ones tend to harbor bacteria.
- Refrigerate freshly cooked baby food within 2 hours. Bacteria can grow at room temperature after this time.

## Baby food storage and preparation – Preparation methods

There are four basic cooking methods –

- steaming
- boiling
- baking
- microwaving

These are then followed by pureeing or mashing, depending on the type of food and your baby's age.



These are all methods that you will have used to cook your own food. So the good news is that your kitchen is already well equipped to cook for baby!

The second piece of good news is that if you cook in bulk, you can prepare an entire month's supply of food in one afternoon! This really demonstrates how we *all* have the time to cook our own baby food – it just takes a little organization!

So which is the best method to adopt when cooking for baby?

Well, it depends partly on which *type* of food you are cooking – for example, nothing is simpler than **baking** a sweet potato in its' skin (see first).

Generally speaking, though, **steaming** is the best way of retaining the foods' nutrients. You can use an electric steamer, or do what we do and simply place the foods in a colander over a pan of boiling water.

If you choose to **boil** the food instead, then use very little water and keep any water remaining once the food has cooked. You can then use it to thin purees – that way, if any nutrients *were* lost into the water in the boiling process, you can incorporate them *back* into your baby's food.

**Microwave cooking** also preserves the nutrients in the food, as foods tend to cook quickly and with little water. Some people dislike using microwaves – if you're one of them, then of course choose an alternative method. As parents of five, we've always found the microwave useful as it makes reheating foods so simple and fast. And if you're facing a hungry baby with a bag of frozen baby food – (yes, sometimes we multi-tasking parents will forget to defrost baby's dinner) – then “fast” is the way to go!

### **Baby food storage and preparation – Pureeing or mashing**

For large quantities of food, a blender or food processor is invaluable. If you don't have either, then you *could* push the food through a sieve. We find that a bit slow-going and would really recommend that you treat yourself to a time-saving appliance (you work hard – you deserve it!).