Making Your Own Baby Food
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Many people are taking a closer look at what they eat these days. Parents are also concerned about what their babies eat. One way to know what is in a baby's food is to make it at home. Here are some basic tips and a resource for more detailed information.

Food safety is especially important when preparing food for an infant. A baby’s digestive system does not have the strength to battle the germs and dirt otherwise found on produce. Wash fruit or vegetables carefully under cold running water. Do not use soap, produce washes or any other cleaning products when cleaning baby’s produce as residues may prove challenging to delicate systems. For firm-fleshed produce use a vegetable brush to help clean thoroughly.

Puree foods like fruits and vegetables to make them soft and smooth for a young child who does not have many teeth and has not developed chewing skills yet.

Start by introducing single ingredient foods to help identify any allergies. Common first foods include ripe mashed bananas, smooth applesauce, cooked pureed peaches, pears, potatoes, sweet potatoes, squash, peas, or asparagus.

To puree clean fresh produce, remove peel, seeds and pits. For large items, cut into smaller pieces and cook. Steaming or boiling in a small amount of water, or baking (for some harder foods), are ideal. Use as little cooking liquid as possible to avoid losing nutrients to the water. To capture those nutrients, reserve the cooking liquid and use it to thin out the puree if it is too thick. If the puree turns out too thin, a little infant cereal can be used to thicken it.

Cool quickly and store in the refrigerator for no more than one to two days. If more is made than can be eaten in that time, freeze the rest in small, ready-to-use portions. Freeze in ice cube trays or in one tablespoon dollops on a cookie sheet and cover with plastic wrap. Once frozen, remove and store in a zip-type freezer bag. Remove the number of cubes that will be eaten within a couple of days. Thaw in the refrigerator, under cold running water, or as part of the reheating process.

Homemade baby food is one option for making meals nutritious and safe. For more details on homemade baby food, go to http://search.extension.edu and type in “Making Your Own Baby Food.” For more information on this or any other topic, you can also contact me at 660-425-6434 or HackertJ@missouri.edu or your local University of Missouri Extension office.

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