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opening extract from

Annabel Karmel's New Complete Baby and Toddler Meal Planner

written by

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Contents

Introduction 4

CHAPTER ONE
The best first foods for your baby 6

CHAPTER TWO
First-stage weaning 20

CHAPTER THREE
Second-stage weaning 48

CHAPTER FOUR
Nine to twelve months 90

CHAPTER FIVE
Toddlers 142

Index 203

Acknowledgements 206



Introduction

Weaning your baby is an exciting milestone for any parent. Unfortunately, as soon as you consult family, friends, websites and magazines excitement turns to anxiety. You already feel guilty that you started feeding your baby at 5 months and after 2 weeks of bland, tasteless baby rice you are wondering whether you should venture into the unknown and purée some carrots. But do they contain nitrates? Should they be organic and do you boil or steam them? Should you give carrots for three days, looking for signs of allergy, before moving on to another food? If you freeze portions in ice cube trays should you sterilise the trays first, and is it safe to defrost the cubes in a microwave? And that's just vegetables ... When is it safe to give fish, chicken or meat? Feeding a baby soon becomes a world of wonderment and confusion.

How many old wives' tales have you been told? Do you find yourself withholding foods like eggs, meat and fish but not really knowing why? I'm sorry to say that a lot of the advice you are given is not based on any scientific research. My aim is to guide you through feeding your baby, taking each stage month by month, separating truth from fiction, answering all your questions – thereby giving you the confidence to prepare fresh food that will give your baby the very best start in life.

In early childhood, eating habits and tastes (good or bad) are formed for life. Babies grow more rapidly in their first year than at any other time and you have this window of opportunity between six and twelve months where you can develop your baby's taste-buds. This is the time to introduce many different flavours and textures. Move on to meat, chicken and fish after a few weeks – these are vitally important foods in the first year – and start mashing and chopping food early on or your child can get lazy about chewing. If you bring up your child on fresh foods from the start, the transition to family meals will be much easier. Miss this crucial time and your child may join the ranks of picky eaters.

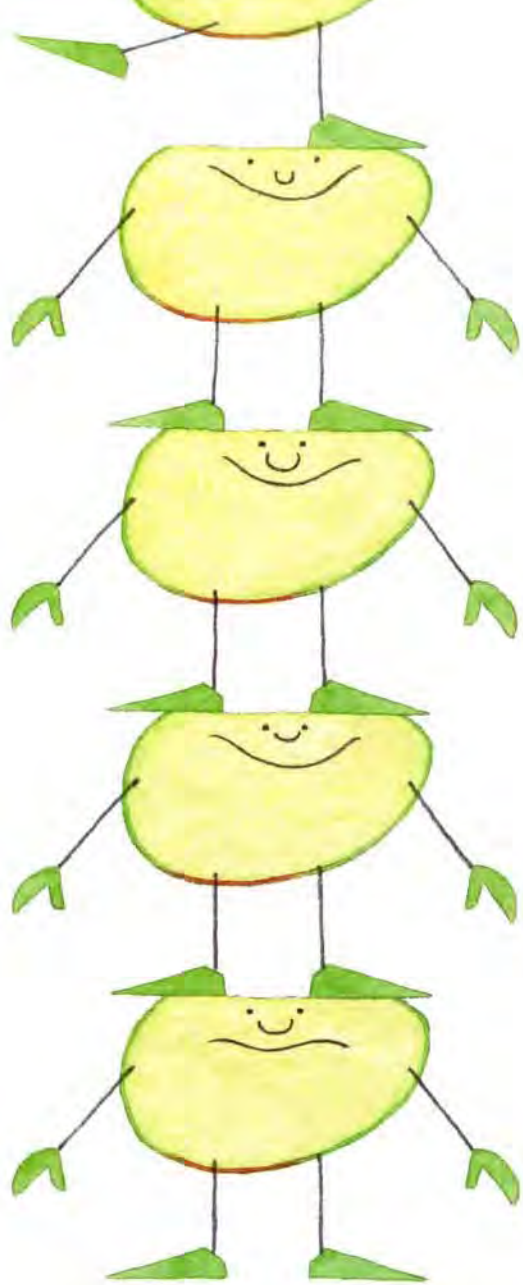
I first wrote this book back in 1991 after the untimely death of my first child Natasha who died due to a rare viral disease. I wanted some good to come from Natasha's short life so I spent many years researching the whole subject of child nutrition, working with top experts in the field. For more than 15 years this has been the leading book on feeding

babies and children and has been translated into over 20 languages. This new edition takes in all the latest research in child nutrition, includes new improved versions of the original recipes, 25 brand new recipes and photographs that bring the recipes to life.

With 90 per cent of junk food being bought by parents for their kids and more than one in five under-fours in Britain overweight we need to bring back home cooking. For the past 16 years I've probably spent more time in the kitchen cooking up healthy children's meals than anyone in the country and all the recipes are tested on a panel of babies and toddlers. With a little bit of help from the book, you too can be making really nutritious food that's easy to prepare and plate-lickingly good. I can also promise that you and your kids will love the results without spending hours in the kitchen.

I hope you enjoy the advice and recipes in this book as much as I have enjoyed creating them ...

Annabel Karmel





CHAPTER ONE

The best first foods for your baby



The current UK Department of Health recommendations state that babies should not begin weaning until they are six months old and should be exclusively breastfed until this time. However, this has only recently changed from 'between four and six months'. Statistics have shown that the majority of babies in the UK begin weaning before six months, and most health professionals recognise that many babies show signs that they are ready for weaning at a younger age than six months. The very minimum age should be 17 weeks, as a baby's digestive system won't fully mature for the first few months and foreign proteins very early on may increase the likelihood of food allergies.

Milk is still the major food

It is very important to remember, when starting your baby on solids, that milk is still the best and most natural food for growing babies. I would encourage mothers to give breastfeeding a try. Apart from the emotional benefits, breast milk contains antibodies that will help protect infants from infection. In the first few months, they are particularly vulnerable and the colostrum a mother produces in the first few days of breastfeeding is a very important source of antibodies which help to build up a baby's immune system. (If only for this reason, it is obvious that there are some enormous benefits in breastfeeding your child, even for as little as one week.) It is also medically proven that breastfed babies are less likely to develop certain diseases in later life.

Milk should contain all the nutrients your baby needs to grow. There are 65 calories in 120 ml/4 fl oz milk, and formula milk is fortified with vitamins and iron. Cow's milk isn't such a 'complete' food for human babies so is best not started until your baby is one year old. Solids are introduced to add bulk to a baby's diet, and to introduce new tastes, textures and aromas; they also help the baby to practise using the muscles in his mouth. But giving a baby too much solid food too early may lead to constipation, and provide fewer nutrients than he needs. It would be very difficult for a baby to get the equivalent amount of nutrients from the small amount of solids he will consume as he gets from his milk.

Don't use softened water or repeatedly boiled water when making up your baby's bottle, because of the danger of concentrating mineral salts. Babies' bottles should not be warmed in a microwave, as the milk may be too hot even though the bottle feels cool to the touch. Warm bottles by standing them in hot water.

Between four and six months babies should have 500–600 ml/18–21 fl oz breast or infant formula each day. 500 ml/18 fl oz is enough when solids are introduced but it isn't between four and six months with no solids. It's important to make sure that, up to the age of eight months, your baby drinks milk at least four times a day (especially as it is highly likely that a bottle may not be finished at each feed). If the number of feeds is reduced too quickly, your baby will not be able to drink as much as is needed. Some mothers make the mistake of giving their baby

solid food when he is hungry, when what he really needs is an additional milk feed.

Babies should be given breast or formula milk for the whole of the first year. Ordinary cow's, goat's or sheep's milk is not suitable as your baby's main drink as it doesn't contain enough iron and other nutrients for proper growth. However, whole cow's milk can be used in cooking or with cereal when weaning. Dairy products like yoghurt, fromage frais and cheese can be introduced once first tastes of fruit and vegetables are accepted and are generally very popular with babies. Choose full-fat products as opposed to low-fat as babies need the calories for proper growth.

Fresh is best

Fresh foods just do taste, smell and look better than jars of pre-prepared baby foods. Nor is there any doubt that, prepared correctly, they are better for your baby (and you), for it is inevitable that nutrients, especially vitamins, are lost in the processing of pre-prepared baby foods. Home-made foods taste different from the jars you can buy. I believe your child will be less fussy and find the transition to joining in with family meals easier if he is used to a wide selection of fresh tastes and textures from an early age.

Organic

Organic fruit and vegetables are produced without artificial chemicals, such as pesticides and fertilisers. However, there is at present no scientific evidence that pesticide levels in ordinary foods are harmful to young babies and children, but some mothers prefer not to take the risk. It is an environmentally friendly option but generates higher prices and it is up to you to decide whether it's worth the extra money.

GM foods

Genetic modification (GM) is the process of transferring genes from one species to another. For example, a tendency to resist damage from certain insects could be implanted from one plant to another. More research is needed to know whether genetic modification can improve the quality and availability of crops or whether the cost to humans and the environment outweighs any benefit. If you wish to avoid GM foods, consult the labels as by 2005 it will be compulsory to declare GM ingredients.

Nutritional requirements

Proteins

Proteins are needed for the growth and repair of our bodies; any extra can be used to provide energy (or is deposited as fat). Proteins are made up of different amino acids. Some foods (meat, fish, soya beans and dairy produce, including cheeses) contain all the amino acids that are essential to our bodies. Other foods (grains, pulses, nuts and seeds) are valuable sources of protein but don't contain all the essential amino acids.

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates and fat provide our bodies with their main source of energy. There are two types of carbohydrate: sugar and starch (which in complex

form provides fibre). In both types there are two forms: natural and refined. The natural form provides a more healthy alternative.

Fats

Fats provide the most concentrated source of energy, and babies need proportionately more fat in their diet than adults. Energy-dense foods like cheese, meat and eggs are needed to fuel their rapid growth and development, and fat provides more than 50 per cent of the energy in breast milk. Foods that contain fats also contain fat soluble vitamins A, D, E and K, which are important for the healthy development of your baby. The problem is that many people eat too much fat and the wrong type.

There are two types of fat – saturated (solid at room temperature) which mainly come from animal sources and from artificially hardened fats found in cakes, biscuits and hard margarines, and unsaturated (liquid at room temperature), which come from vegetable sources. It is the saturated fats which are the most harmful and which may lead to high cholesterol levels and coronary disease later in life.

It is important to give your baby whole milk (full-fat) for at least the first two years but try to reduce fats in cooking and use butter and margarine in moderation. Try to reduce saturated fats in your child's diet by cutting down on fatty meats like fatty minced meat or sausages and replace them with lean red meat, chicken or oily fish.

Essential fatty acids (EFAs) are important for your baby's brain and visual development. There are two types of EFA – omega 6 from seed oils, e.g. sunflower, safflower and corn, and omega 3 from oily fish, e.g. salmon, trout, sardines and fresh tuna (N.B. not tinned tuna). In general we get enough omega 6 in our diets – it is the omega 3 that is often low. The right balance of both types of EFAs are important, especially in early life.

Sugars

Natural

- Fruits and fruit juices
- Vegetables and vegetable juices

Refined

- Sugars and honey
- Soft drinks
- Sweet jellies
- Jams and other preserves
- Biscuits and cakes

Starches

Natural

- Wholegrain breakfast cereals, flour, bread and pasta
- Brown rice
- Potatoes
- Dried beans and lentils
- Peas, bananas and many other fruits and vegetables

Refined

- Processed breakfast cereals (e.g. sugar-coated flakes)
- White flour, breads and pasta
- White rice
- Sugary biscuits and cakes

The Essential Vitamins and Minerals

VITAMIN A
Essential for growth, healthy skin, tooth enamel and good vision. Also boosts the immune system.
Liver
Oily fish
Carrots
Dark green leafy vegetables (e.g. broccoli)
Orange and red fruit and vegetables (e.g. carrots, red peppers, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, apricots, mangoes and squash)

VITAMIN B COMPLEX
Essential for growth, for changing food into energy, for a healthy nervous system and as an aid to digestion. There are a large number of vitamins in the B group. Some are found in many foods, but no foods except for liver and yeast extract contain them all.
Meat
Sardines
Dairy produce and eggs
Wholegrain cereals
Dark green vegetables
Yeast extract (e.g. Marmite)
Nuts
Dried beans
Bananas

VITAMIN C
Needed for growth, healthy tissue and healing of wounds as it helps to fight infection. It also helps in the absorption of iron.
Vegetables such as:
broccoli, sweet peppers, potatoes, spinach, cauliflower
Fruits such as:
citrus fruits, blackcurrants, melon, papaya, strawberries, kiwi fruit

VITAMIN D
Essential for proper bone formation, it works in conjunction with calcium. It's found in few foods, but is made by the skin in the presence of sunlight.
Oily fish
Eggs
Margarine
Dairy produce

VITAMIN E
Important for the composition of the cell structure. Helps the body create and maintain red blood cells.
Vegetable oils
Avocado
Wheatgerm
Nuts and seeds

CALCIUM
Important for strong bones, good teeth and growth.
Dairy products
Canned fish with bones (e.g. sardines)
Dried fruit
White bread
Green leafy vegetables
Pulses

IRON
Needed for healthy blood and muscles. Iron deficiency is very common and will leave your child feeling tired and run down. Red meat is the best source of iron. It's more difficult to absorb iron from non-meat sources. However, if combined with vitamin C-rich foods, iron absorption can be increased by about 30 per cent.
Red meat, especially liver
Oily fish
Egg yolks
Dried fruits (especially apricots)
Wholegrain and fortified cereals
Lentils and dried beans
Green leafy vegetables

For most babies who eat fresh food in sufficient quantities and drink formula milk until the age of one year, vitamin supplements are probably unnecessary. However, in the UK the Department of Health recommends that if your baby is being breastfed (breastmilk doesn't contain enough Vitamin D) or is drinking less than 500 ml/18 fl oz of infant formula a day, you should give him vitamin supplements from the age of six months to two years. Ask your health visitor for advice.

Children following a vegan diet should have at least 600 ml/21 fl oz of a fortified infant soya milk daily until the age of two, then they won't need supplements. It is mainly Vitamins A and D that are likely to be low in children aged six months to two years who don't have 500 ml/18 fl oz fortified infant or soya formula.

Vitamins are necessary for the correct development of the brain and nervous system. A good balanced diet should supply all the nutrients your child needs and an excess of vitamins is potentially harmful, but children who are picky eaters could benefit by taking a multi-vitamin supplement specially designed for children.

There are two types of vitamins – water-soluble (C and B complex) and fat-soluble (A, D, E and K). Water-soluble vitamins cannot be stored by the body, so foods containing these should be eaten daily. They can also easily be destroyed by overcooking, especially when fruits and vegetables are boiled in water. You should try to preserve these vitamins by eating the foods raw or just lightly cooked (in a steamer, for instance).

High-Risk Foods

More and more children are developing an allergy to sesame seeds, so don't give them to highly atopic babies until they're at least nine months. Berry and citrus fruits can trigger a reaction but rarely cause a true allergy. The most common allergic problems that may be triggered by an adverse reaction to food are: nausea; vomiting; diarrhoea; asthma; eczema; hayfever; rashes and swelling of the eyes, lips and face. This is one reason why it's unwise to rush starting your baby on solid foods.

Potential high-risk foods

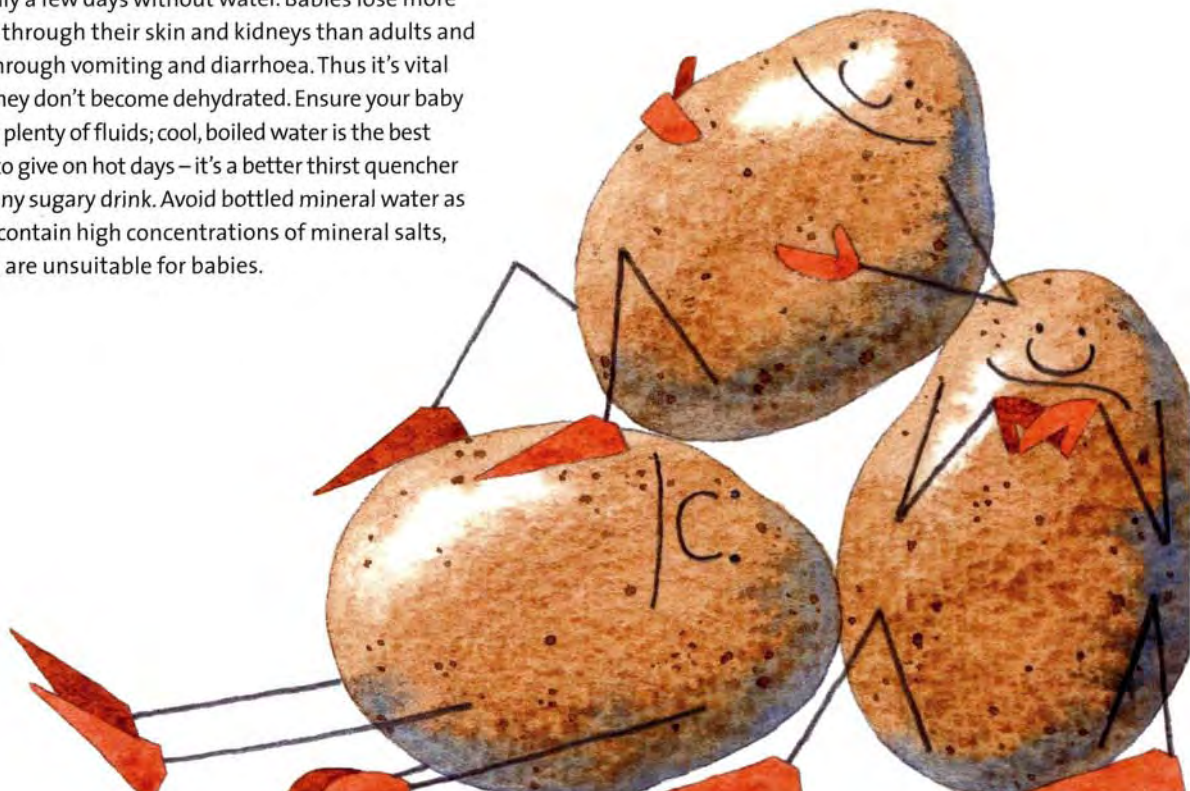
- Cow's milk and dairy produce
- Nuts and seeds
- Eggs
- Wheat-based products
- Fish (especially shellfish)
- Chocolate

Water

Humans can survive for quite a time without food, but only a few days without water. Babies lose more water through their skin and kidneys than adults and also through vomiting and diarrhoea. Thus it's vital that they don't become dehydrated. Ensure your baby drinks plenty of fluids; cool, boiled water is the best drink to give on hot days – it's a better thirst quencher than any sugary drink. Avoid bottled mineral water as it can contain high concentrations of mineral salts, which are unsuitable for babies.

It really isn't necessary to give a very young baby anything to drink other than milk or plain water if he is just thirsty. Fruit syrups, squashes and sweetened herbal drinks should be discouraged, to prevent dental decay. Don't be fooled if the packet says 'dextrose' – this is just a type of sugar.

If your baby refuses to drink water, then give him unsweetened baby juice or fresh 100 per cent fruit juice. Dilute according to instructions or, for fresh juice, use one part juice to three parts water.



The Question of Allergies

If your family has a history of food allergy or atopic disease such as hayfever, asthma or eczema, there is an increased risk of developing an allergic disorder, so foods should be introduced with great care. If possible, breastfeed exclusively for the first six months. If not, discuss with your doctor the option of using a 'hypoallergenic' infant formula instead. When weaning, start with low allergen foods like baby rice, root vegetables, apple or pear. New foods should be introduced one at a time and tried for two or three days. In that way, if there is a reaction you will know what has caused it. Avoid high-risk foods until your baby is nine to twelve months old.

There's no need to worry about food allergies unless there is a family history of allergy or atopic disease. The incidence of food allergy in normal babies is very small and, with the tendency to a later introduction of solid food at six months, they've become even less common. Don't remove key foods like milk and wheat from your child's diet before consulting a doctor. Many children grow out of their allergies by the age of two, but some – particularly a sensitivity to eggs, milk, nuts or shellfish – can last for life. If your child has an allergy, tell any adults who may feed him.

Never be afraid to take your baby to the doctor if you are worried that something is wrong. Young babies' immune systems aren't fully matured and babies can become ill very quickly if they aren't treated properly and can develop serious complications.

Lactose Intolerance

Lactose intolerance isn't actually an allergy but the inability to digest lactose – the sugar in milk – because of a lack of a digestive enzyme. This can be hereditary and, if this is the case, your child may experience nausea, cramps, bloating, diarrhoea and gas, usually about 30 minutes after consuming dairy foods, and should be given a special diet that avoids all dairy products. Since lactose is present in breast and cow's milk, babies who are lactose intolerant should be given soya formula. However, soya milk isn't recommended for babies under the age of six months, and so these babies should be given a special low-lactose infant formula (sometimes labelled 'LF').

Lactose intolerance is a rare complication that can occur after a gastrointestinal infection. In children over one year, it's safe to remove milk products for a few days to see if this makes a difference. In babies under a year, continue to breastfeed but, if additional feeds are needed, talk to a doctor, health visitor or pharmacist about using a low-lactose feed for a couple of weeks.

If children suffer from lactose intolerance due to a lack of lactase, this will last for life.

Cow's Milk Protein Allergy

If you think your baby is sensitive to cow's milk, you should consult your doctor. Breast milk is the best alternative, but mothers should limit their own consumption of dairy products as they can be transferred to their baby through breast milk. If breastfeeding has ceased, your doctor will

recommend an extensively hydrolysed (low-allergen) infant formula, which is available on prescription.

This condition means that no dairy products are tolerated. Milk-free vegetable or soya margarine may be substituted for butter. There are also many soya-based (non-dairy) yoghurts and desserts available and carob can be substituted for milk chocolate. Babies often outgrow this allergy by the age of two, but until then it's important to ensure your child gets enough calcium in his diet.

Eggs

Eggs can be given from six months but they must be thoroughly cooked until both the white and the yolk are solid. Soft-boiled eggs can be given after one year.

Fruits

Some children have an adverse reaction to citrus, berries and kiwi fruit. Rosehip and blackcurrant, being rich in Vitamin C, make good alternatives to orange juice.

Honey

Honey should not be given to children under twelve months as it can cause infant botulism. Although this is very rare, it is best to be safe as a baby's digestive system is too immature to deal with the bug.

Nuts

It is rare to be allergic to tree nuts such as walnuts and hazelnuts. However, peanuts and peanut products can induce a severe allergic reaction – anaphylactic shock – which can be life threatening, so it's best to be cautious. In families with a history of any allergy including hayfever, eczema and asthma, it's advisable to avoid all products containing peanuts, including peanut oil, until the child is three years old, and then seek medical advice before introducing peanut products into the diet. Peanut butter and finely ground nuts, however, can be introduced from six months, provided there is no family history of allergy.

It is important to only buy packaged food that is labelled 'nut free'; loose bakery products, sweets and chocolates may contain nuts. Children under the age of five shouldn't be given whole nuts because of the risk of choking.

Gluten

Gluten is found in wheat, rye, barley and oats. Foods containing gluten, such as bread or pasta, should not be introduced into any baby's diet before six months.

When buying baby cereals and rusks, choose varieties that are gluten-free. Baby rice is the safest to try at first, and thereafter there are plenty of alternative gluten-free products such as soya, corn, rice, millet rice noodles and buckwheat spaghetti, and potato flours for thickening and baking.

In some cases intolerance to wheat and similar proteins is temporary, and children may grow out of the condition before they are two or three years old. However, although it is rare, some people suffer from a permanent sensitivity to gluten known as coeliac

disease. Symptoms include loss of appetite, poor growth, swollen abdomen and pale and particularly smelly stools. Coeliac disease can be diagnosed by a blood test and can be confirmed by looking at the gut wall using endoscopy.

Gastro-oesophageal reflux

Reflux is caused when a weak valve at the top of a baby's stomach allows their feed, along with gastric acid, to come back up, causing symptoms including vomiting and heartburn. All babies are born with this weak valve but some regurgitate excessive amounts because of reflux. Regular vomiting, refusing feeds or only managing small amounts at a time, losing or not gaining weight, or crying excessively after feeds can all be symptoms of reflux. If you are worried take your baby to your GP.

If your baby is diagnosed with reflux:

- Holding your baby in an upright position during and about 20 minutes after each feed can help.
- Raising the head end of your baby's cot a few inches off the ground by placing blocks or thick books under the legs of the cot means gravity will help to keep his feed down.
- Try giving smaller, more frequent feeds so as not to overload your baby's stomach.
- In more severe cases it can be worth trying feed thickeners that can be used when breast- or bottle-feeding. There are also several prethickened formulas available on prescription. Some babies also require antacid medicines. Most cases of gastro-oesophageal reflux improve after starting solids but for most babies this is not an indication to start solids early.

Preparing Baby Foods

Preparing and cooking baby foods isn't difficult but, because you're dealing with a baby, considerations like hygiene must be of the utmost importance. Always wash fruit and vegetables carefully before cooking.

Equipment

Most of the equipment you require will already be in your kitchen – mashers, graters, sieves, etc. – but the following four pieces may not be, and I consider them to be vital!

Mouli/baby food grinder (see page 208) This hand-turned food mill purées the food, separating it from the seeds and tough fibres which can be difficult for the baby to digest. It is ideal for foods like dried apricots, sweetcorn or green beans, and is also good for potato, which becomes sticky in a food processor or blender.

Electric hand blender This is easy to clean and ideal for making small quantities of baby purée.

Food processor This is good for puréeing larger quantities when making batches of purées for freezing.

Steamer Steaming food is one of the best ways to preserve nutrients. It is worth buying a multi-tiered

steamer, so you can cook several foods at once. (A colander over a saucepan with a well-fitting lid is a cheaper alternative.)

Sterilising

At first, it is very important to sterilise bottles properly, and particularly the teats that your baby sucks, by whatever approved method you choose. Warm milk is the perfect breeding ground for bacteria and, if bottles are not properly washed and sterilised, your baby can become very ill. However, it is not necessary to sterilise the equipment you use for cooking, puréeing or storing baby food, but take extra care to keep everything very clean.

Use a dishwasher if you have one, which helps to ensure the equipment is perfectly clean. Dry utensils with a clean tea towel or use kitchen paper.

All milk bottles and teats should continue to be sterilised until your baby is one year old, but there is really not much point sterilising spoons or food containers beyond the age when your baby starts to crawl and put everything in reach into his mouth. There is no need to sterilise any other feeding equipment, but do wash bowls and spoons in a dishwasher or by hand at about 27°C/80°F – you will need to wear rubber gloves. If using a food mixer it is a good idea to rinse it out with boiling water as they are a common breeding ground for bugs.

Steaming

Steam the vegetables or fruits until tender. This is the best way to preserve the fresh taste and vitamins. Vitamins B and C are water-soluble and can easily be destroyed by overcooking, especially when foods are boiled in water. Broccoli loses over 60 per cent of its antioxidants when boiled, but less than 7 per cent when steamed.

Boiling

Peel, seed or stone the vegetables or fruits as necessary and cut into pieces. Try to use the minimum amount of water and be careful not to overcook. To make a smooth purée, add just enough of the cooking liquid or a small amount of formula or breast milk.

Microwaving

Place the vegetables or fruit in a suitable dish. Add a little water, cover leaving an air vent and cook on full power until tender (stir halfway through). Purée to the desired consistency. Check that it isn't too hot to serve to your baby and stir well to avoid hot spots.

Baking

If you are cooking a meal for the family in the oven, you could use the opportunity to bake a potato, sweet potato or butternut squash for your baby. Prick the chosen vegetable with a fork and bake until tender. Cut in half (remove the seeds from the squash), scoop out the flesh and mash together with some water or milk.