

Spice up your life

How to make your baby's meals more flavoursome and healthy

Baby food doesn't automatically mean bland. Weaning is an opportunity to broaden your baby's palate. While you might feel cautious about using spices, it's perfectly safe and in fact there are many health benefits. Read on to find out which spices are baby-safe and nutritionally beneficial to little tums...

Added zing!

Did you know some spices have the same high antioxidant levels as popular 'super' foods such as blueberries and avocado?

"Culinary spices have lots of amazing health-promoting properties," says Zainab Jagot Ahmed, author of *Easy Indian SuperMeals*. "They can also be anti-inflammatory, strengthening the immune system and protecting against infection and illness, so they're really beneficial."

Each spice has its own benefits, so try to include a wide range in your family's meals. Don't just add spices to curries – everything from a fillet of fish to shepherd's pie can benefit from a sprinkling of spice.

Full of flavour

There's another important reason why you should spice up your child's meals – to create delicious food. "Spices enhance the taste of basic foods – for example a sweet spice such as cinnamon complements banana and adds a lovely depth of flavour," explains Zainab. "It doesn't mask the taste, but it livens it up, helping to create meals that your child will enjoy." Spices are incredibly versatile too, so play around with different combinations. Variety in your child's diet

at this stage will help her to become a less fussy eater now and when she's older.

The four-day rule

It's generally best to wait until your baby is 7 months to introduce spices, as by then she'll be accustomed to basic tastes and eating food, and also her digestive system will be slightly more developed. Start small, add a pinch to fruit or veg purées and take it from there. "It's very important to follow the four-day rule when giving your child a new spice," Zainab says. "With my daughter, I introduced a cooked spice (for example ground coriander) to mashed potato and then waited four days before getting her to try another spice, that way I could see if her body reacted." Allergies to spices are uncommon but can occur. Symptoms can include tummy upsets, swelling of lips or face, rashes, watery eyes, sneezing, runny nose, vomiting or diarrhoea.

Our tastebuds develop with age, so when weaning it's essential to let your baby try foods several times, even if she doesn't seem to enjoy the taste initially. "My daughter on occasion would scrunch up her face and push the food out with her tongue," Zainab says. "It made me think I was a terrible cook, but when I gave it to her again she would eat it all!" Sometimes because flavours are so new, it can be a little bit of a shock, which is why the reaction you get can be extreme.

For more tips on how to introduce spice into your diet, visit zainabjagotahmed.com

Top of the spice rack

- ✓ **Cinnamon** Aids digestion, strengthens the immune system, boosts memory, balances blood sugar, and its analgesic properties help reduce toothache pain.
- ✓ **Cloves** Antiseptic properties. Treats flatulence and boost memory, digestion and circulation. Also counters toothache.
- ✓ **Tumeric** Antibacterial properties help prevent infection in wounds and cuts, aids digestion and reduces wind.
- ✓ **Cumin** Supports the development of a healthy immune system, improves oxygen distribution, boosts the metabolism and improves the absorption of nutrients.
- ✓ **Mild paprika** Antibiotic properties help protect against bacterial infections.

FORGET THESE FLAVOURS

It's never a good idea to include:

- Salt** Your baby's kidneys are still developing and can't process salt effectively. So never add salt to your child's meal. It's also vital to read food labels to check for hidden salt.
- Sugar** Is a key cause of tooth decay, it's nutritionally deficient and it can lead to obesity. As with salt, check the label for sugar content and don't add any to your child's meals.
- Chilli powder** Stay away from fiery spices until your child is at least 12 months, because heat can be tough on young digestive systems. Watch out if your child tends to rub her eyes, as it's very painful to get chilli in the eye!