INSTRUCTIONS AND TIPS FOR FINGER FOOD

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What is finger food?
Finger food refers to food that babies can eat themselves, with their own fingers. Finger food may consist of cooked, chopped or mashed foods or, for example, whole fresh berries. Finger food is a way for the baby to get acquainted with solid foods. Eating with fingers is the baby's first step towards eating independently with cutlery.

Babies are usually ready to start eating with their fingers at the age of about 6–8 months, when they are able to sit in a high chair and their motor skills are sufficient to take food into their mouths and chew and swallow it. The willingness and readiness to taste solid foods can be seen, for example, when the baby grabs at food from the parents' plates during meals, watches the parents eat with interest, and opens or smacks his/her mouth.

Finger food can be tested in good time, and the readiness of the baby to start eating solid food can be observed. If the baby is not motorically ready, he/she will probably spit the food out or just suck it in his/her mouth.

Benefits of finger food With finger food, the baby learns to eat and enjoy shared meals with other family members. The baby learns to eat

Examples of finger foods suitable for children under 1 year old

Vegetables, fruit, berries	– Fruit and vegetables, whole or in pieces (banana, pear, apple, avocado, melons, cucumber) – Boiled vegetables/root vegetables (potato, carrot, sweet potato, parsnip, swede, cauliflower, broccoli, corn, peas) – Roasted vegetables – Berries (strawberry, blueberry, raspberry, lingonberry, currants) – Pulses (beans and lentils)
Grain products	– Rye bread heels, crispbread – Cooked macaroni and rice – Thick porridge – Corn snacks
Meat, fish, egg	– Boiled, baked or fried fish – Home-made meatballs or minced meat patties – Tender whole meat in small pieces – Boiled egg, scrambled eggs – Crayfish or shrimps without salt – Tofu without salt
Dairy products	– Cottage cheese from the age of 10 months
Fat	– For finger food eaters, a fat supplement may be necessary

Note! When offering finger food, the child's motor development, number of teeth and age must be taken into account. The maternity and child health clinic provides information on age-specific nutrition recommendations and individual guidance according to which finger eating should also be carried out.

independently and gets acquainted with new flavours and foods through all senses: touching, smelling, looking and tasting. In finger food, it is important for babies to be able to decide for themselves what they eat, how much and how.

Coarse finger foods require chewing, which develops the fine motor skills of the mouth and promotes digestion, dental health and speech learning.

Starting and progressing with finger food

Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended until the age of 4–6 months. For a baby born full-term at normal weight, breast milk is sufficient as sole nutrition up to the age of six months. Beginning at the age of 4–6 months, according to individual needs, a child can be offered tasting portions of solid food, which can be puréed in the early stages. Finger food can be switched to either partially or completely when the child is motorically ready for it. However, breast milk or, in the absence thereof, infant formula/follow-on formula is the primary source of nourishment until the age of one year. It is good to remember that eating finger food must also proceed in accordance with the nutritional recommendations for Finnish infants.

Eating finger food begins with tasting portions, and the quantities eaten are often very small at the beginning. In the early stages, offer large slices or pieces that fit the baby's fist to make it easy for the baby to practice taking food into the mouth. Good foods to start with include slices of avocado, steamed or boiled vegetables in large pieces (e.g. potato, broccoli, carrot, sweet potato) or a whole/half banana.

As the baby's motor skills develop, smaller pieces and smaller foods can be offered as finger food so that the baby can practice the key pinch grip. At this stage, you can offer the baby, for example, berries, peas, corn and small pieces of fruit.

Recipes from blogs: Marjut Ollila Simppelisormiruokakeittiö.com, Onnelin pikku keittiö, Soppaa ja sirkushuveja.

Frozen bananas

Cut the bananas into slices or pieces of the desired size. For example, you can put a popsicle in half a banana or freeze it as it is for a few hours. Frozen bananas are not as slippery as fresh and do not mix in the same way. A cool banana also brings relief to itchy and painful gums. Try other fruits as well!

***Chicken sticks* 20 pcs**

400 g minced chicken
2 grated carrots
1 dl (oat) flakes
1–2 grated apples
In addition, if desired, for seasoning: 1 crushed garlic clove, 1 tablespoon dried herbs, 1 teaspoon paprika powder

Mix all the ingredients together and shape into sticks. Bake at 200 °C for about 30 minutes.

***Carrot omelettes in muffin tin* 12 pcs**

6 eggs
2 large boiled carrots
1 tsp dried basil
A pinch of unsalted spices

Beat the eggs lightly. Add the boiled and chopped carrots with the spices and stir. Pour the omelette mixture into the muffin tins about halfway. Bake at 200 ℃ for about 15 minutes.

Instructions for successful finger food

1. Give the baby breast milk or formula before eating.

2. Ensure that the baby sits firmly in the chair. If the baby is not able to sit upright, it can cause a dangerous situation. In this case, the baby may not be able to control his/her body when gagging and to bend forward. If sitting alone does not go well, a safe place to eat is in the arms of the parent and in the upright position. A baby bouncer, etc. is not a safe place to eat.

3. Let the baby decide for him/herself what he/she wants to eat. The child will spit out foods that are unpleasant or taste unfamiliar. It may take at least 10–15 tries to get used to a new taste. Do not scold a child even if he/she does not like some food and spits food out of his/her mouth. A meal should be a fun and positive event for the whole family!

4. Eat finger food and taste different foods together with your baby. Parents' own actions are of great significance, and even a small child follows the parents' example. They will therefore try more foods.

5. Playing with food and a little mess is OK, so reserve an easy to clean plastic mat or other platform under the high chair if necessary. If a normal bib does not adequately protect your child from the mess, you may consider buying a sleeved food apron.

6. The gag reflex is important for the baby, and gagging is usually part of every child's development phase before the child learns to handle food in his/her mouth and swallow it consciously. With the help of gagging, the baby can move food to the middle of the mouth and eating can continue. In some babies, the reflex lasts longer and learning takes more time. Offer pieces big enough for the baby to adjust the size of the piece he/she bites.

7. Do not offer the baby food that is too hard or too difficult in size. Such foods include nuts, almonds and grapes with skin.

8. Never leave the baby alone or unattended with food.

9. Always consider the baby's motor skills, number of teeth and age when offering different finger foods. Serve only age-appropriate foods or follow the individual instructions given by the nurse, doctor or nutritionist at the maternity and child health clinic.

Eating together – food recommendations for families with children
https://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/137770/URN_ISBN_978-952-343-264-2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Granola bars

1 banana
1 tsp oil
1 dl oat flakes
(berries or grated fruit or vegetables)

Mash the banana with a fork and mix with the oat flakes and oil. Form sticks of dough on baking paper and bake at 180–200 degrees for about 10 minutes, depending on the size of the granola bars. Instead of bananas, you can also use fruit purée (1 dl puree and 1–1.5 dl oat flakes). Add berries or, for example, grated pear for a different taste.

Pea crush patties *18 pcs*

2 dl water
100g frozen cauliflower
0.5 dl pea crush
1 dl oat flakes
1 dl grated carrot
1 tsp dried mint
1 tsp dried dragon
1 tbsp oil
2 eggs

Boil the frozen cauliflowers in water and purée with the cooking water. Add the pea crush and oatmeal to the hot purée. Allow to swell for 15 minutes. Add the grated carrot, spices, oil and eggs. Use the spoon to form dollops on the baking tray. Bake

at 225 ℃ for 10 minutes.