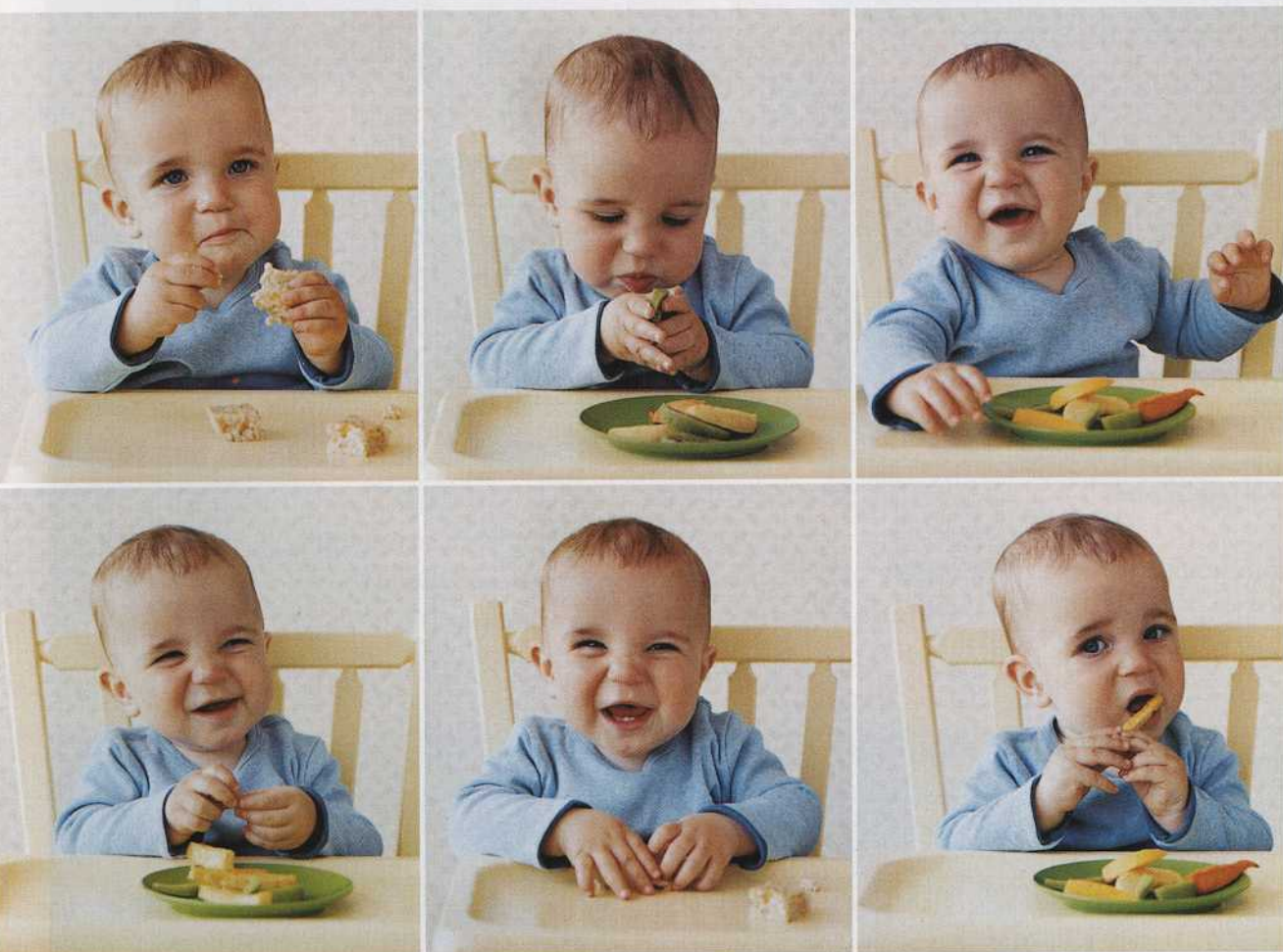


# finger foods

add **variety** to your toddler's diet with our **easy-to-make** healthy recipes.

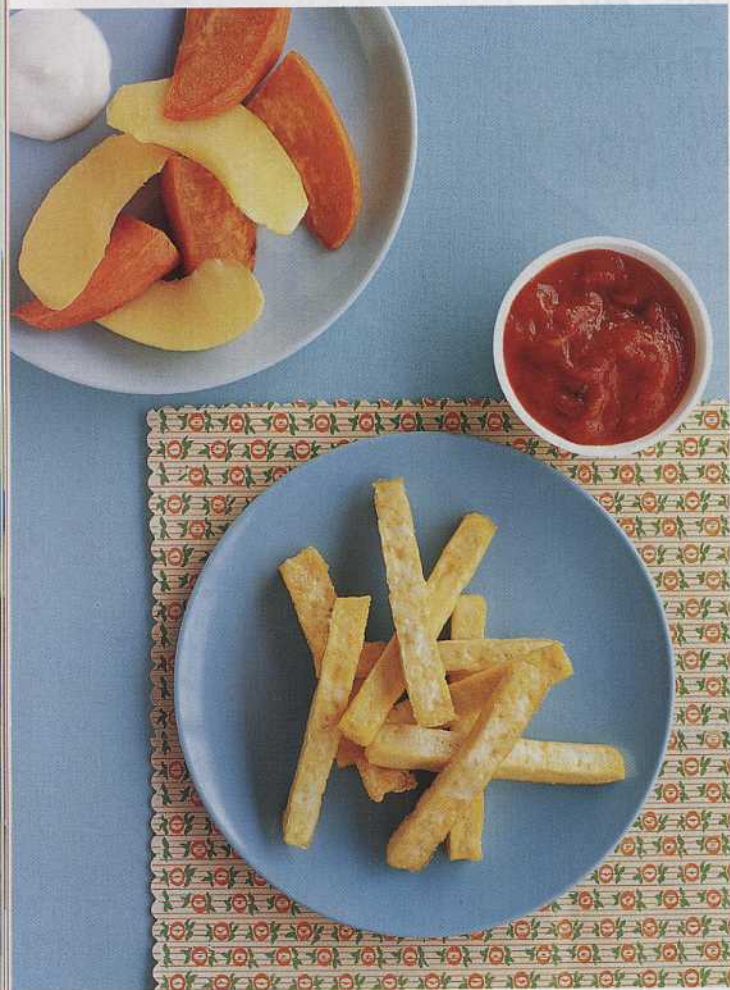


THE FIRST TIME YOUR LITTLE ONE gums a bit of banana is a joyful milestone. You are at once tickled and filled with pride. He's developed enough dexterity to pick up pieces of food and shove them in his mouth (this usually occurs between 7 and 9 months), and he may applaud himself with every bite. That's the *first* time. Once he's ready to trade these simple tastes for "real food"—which most pediatricians recommend around 9 months—many parents find that their joy turns to chagrin. You want him to eat well, but besides grilled cheese sandwiches and chicken nuggets, which seem to be all he'll eat without gagging in dislike, you've run out of ideas.

**Mealtime is extra fun for 1-year-old Lucian now that finger foods are on the menu. He can practice feeding himself and sample exciting new tastes.**

TEXT BY DINA ROTH PORT  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
WILLIAM MEPPEN





Add to this frustration the reality that most new parents constantly worry that their babies aren't eating enough and getting sufficient nutrition, and it's no wonder pediatricians say mealtime struggles top the list of concerns they hear about at checkup time. But feeding a toddler doesn't have to be such a struggle. With a little inspiration (see our suggestions on these pages) and some experimentation, it is possible to discover a variety of finger foods that are healthy, simple to make, and appealing to young palates.

Until a child is about 1 year old, it's important to cut his food into manageable quarter-inch morsels, says Frank Greer, M.D., a professor of pediatrics at the University of Wisconsin in Madison who specializes in



### savory sticks

Left: Mild, crispy **tofu sticks** (at bottom) resemble french fries but are packed with protein. They are easy for babies 1 year and older to grasp; toddlers can dunk them in a tomato sauce. **Wedges of baked yams and roasted apples** (at top) are a delicious side dish or snack on their own; serve with yogurt for dipping.

### cheesy sandwiches

Above: Children age 1 and older will find these mini sandwiches irresistible. **In between the whole-wheat bread is a creamy ricotta spread filled with carrots, peppers, and broccoli that gives the sandwiches their fresh, sweet flavor (this spread is just as good in other dishes; try it in an omelet or stir into pasta).**

### EASY BASICS

Looking for variety? Try these fruits and vegetables: fresh kiwi fruit or avocado wedges; steamed carrots, broccoli, parsnips, cauliflower, or asparagus (peeled); squash wedges or baked yam (peeled).

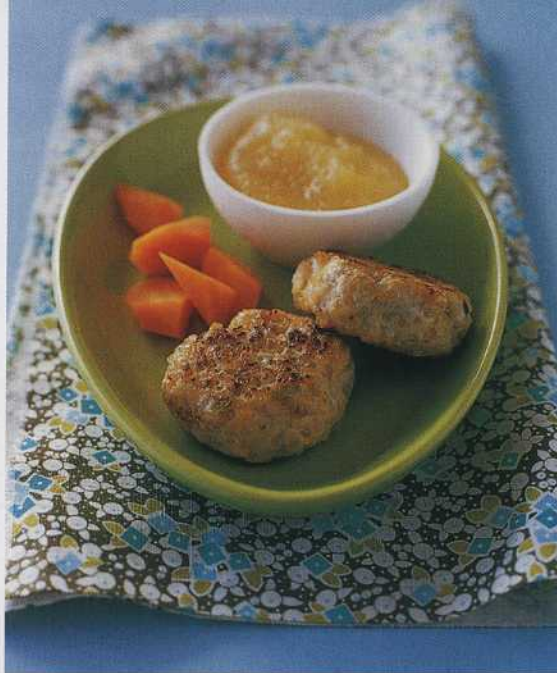
### FOODS TO AVOID

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, cow's milk, wheat, corn, citrus, and soy can cause bad reactions in babies younger than 1 year old.

If allergies run in the family, wait until kids are at least 3 years old before you serve them peanuts, tree nuts, fish, or shellfish.

These snacks are choking hazards for children younger than 4: hot dogs, whole grapes, popcorn, chunks of peanut butter, and raw vegetables.



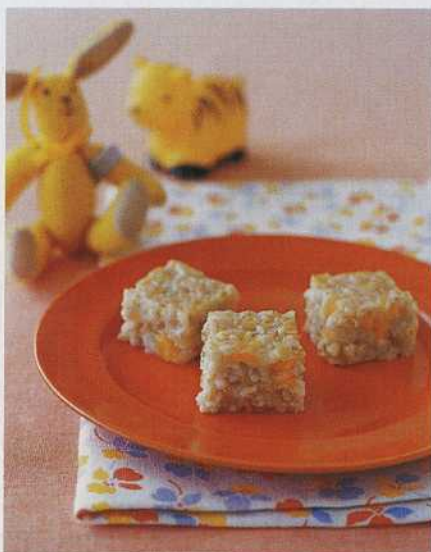


### chicken and apple patties

**Above:** These savory pan-fried cakes are an ideal transition food for kids 10 months and older. They contain quinoa, a light nutty grain high in protein, calcium, and iron, and are delicious dipped in applesauce. Steamed until soft, carrot wedges round out the meal.

### oatmeal squares

**Below:** Oatmeal and fruit in fun chewy cubes are a great first finger food. We used apricots, but you can substitute any soft fruit.



### sesame rice balls

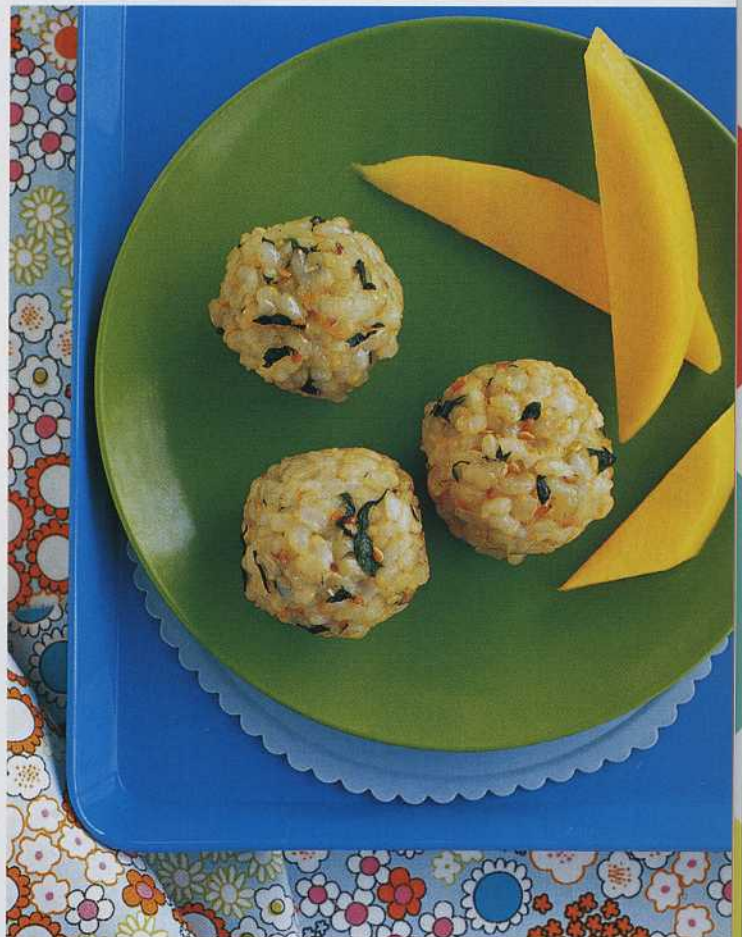
**Right:** Even picky eaters won't mind the flecks of spinach in these rice balls. The tasty golf-ball-size nuggets are easy for kids 18 months and older to hold and bite. Sesame seeds add iron as well as flavor; brown rice is an excellent source of fiber. Serve warm or at room temperature with peeled sliced fruit, such as mango.

SEE THE RECIPES SECTION

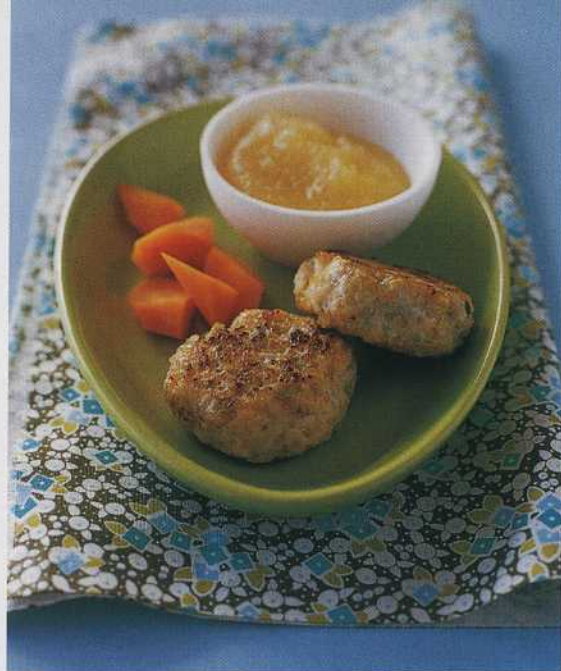
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infant nutrition. Sometime between 12 and 15 months, most babies are ready to hold and nibble larger pieces.

As for variety, offer all five food groups (grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy, and protein such as meat, beans, and fish) every day, spread among meals and snacks. Your efforts won't always be successful. It may take multiple attempts before your baby will accept a new dish; wait a week and try again. Some days he'll eat only meat, other days more vegetables (well, one can dream), and often all he needs is a few bites to feel full. Even if he skips a meal occasionally, don't panic. "Young children self-regulate," says Greer. Over the course of a week or month, most will have a balanced diet. As long as your child is growing at a steady rate, you can rest easy and enjoy introducing him to new culinary adventures.





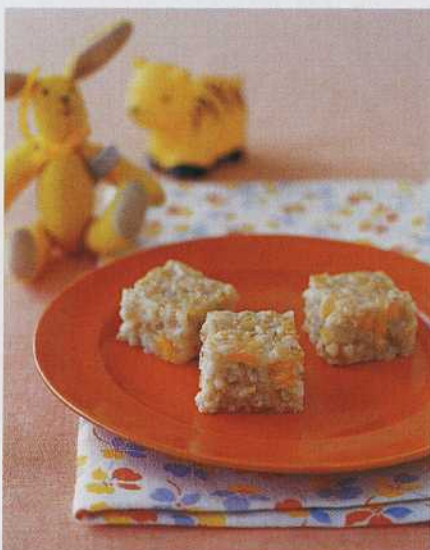


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