

# Indian SuperMeals

Baby & Toddler Cookbook

Zainab Jagot Ahmed

Recipes  
bursting with  
SuperFoods &  
SuperSpices



Over 60 yummy, nutritious, baby-friendly  
recipes from 7 months-3 years

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xxx

## INTRODUCTION



Every parent wants to feed their baby nutritious food to ensure their little one has the best start in life. So, being a new mum myself, I was extremely cautious about the types of food I was feeding my daughter Aaliyah, when I began weaning her at 6 months. Which I’m sure every woman can relate to at some point during their career as ‘mum’.

After reading books, numerous websites, and seeking advice from family and friends about weaning and the best weaning foods, my anxiety about “where to begin?!” settled, and her solid food journey began with iron-fortified baby rice (with her usual milk), pureed fruit and vegetables and her regular milk feeds. That seemed straight forward enough. However, only a month later when Aaliyah turned 7 months old, she was already set for Stage 2 feeding (soft lumps, new tastes, flavours and textures). The confusion and panic of “what should I feed her now?!” started all over again! Buying bland processed, lumpy baby food was not appealing in the slightest! Particularly as the more processed the food, the more additives it contains which ultimately means the nutritional content is reduced.

Buying processed food is tempting if you are a frantic, busy parent, but feeding your little one nutritionally inadequate food will be detrimental to health as babies need nutrient-rich food for

healthy growth. **It's important to shape healthy eating habits as early as possible, and to maintain these habits**. With one in three children in England (33.4%) being either overweight or obese in the final year of primary school (Year 6), according to the National Child Measurement Programme 2010/11, it is imperative to act now, as obese children are increasingly likely to grow into obese adults leading to diabetes, high blood pressure and joint problems later in life. For obese children there are additional psychological effects such as low self-esteem due to the possibility of being taunted at school.

Therefore home-cooking was the obvious choice for me because I could cook with nutrient-rich food. I know exactly what ingredients were in Aaliyah's meals, it would be cost-effective, fresh, healthy and tastier. By planning ahead, I could also cook and freeze meals for the forthcoming week, saving valuable time too.

So Aaliyah's Stage 2 feeding began with steamed vegetables and cheese all blended to a soft lump consistency. But then I thought, "why am I feeding my daughter such bland food?" Being from India and of Indian origin myself, I wasn't raised on steamed veggies and cheese and **neither are billions of other ethnic people across the world!**

Wanting Aaliyah to be in touch with her roots, I searched for Indian baby food recipes online and found many cookery books I could buy, but surprisingly I didn't find much. I also asked family and friends if they knew of any good Indian baby food cookery books, and they didn't know of any either. We were all in the same boat! One day, deep in thought I felt a flicker of inspiration and then 'PING!'... Light bulb moment! I decided to create my own healthy adaptations of traditional Indian recipes.

My first attempt was Gajar Halwa (carrot dessert), simply because the main ingredient is carrot, a very tasty sweet root vegetable which is extremely healthy for babies. I cooked up a batch following a conventional recipe but stripped it right back to remove all the bad stuff. I avoided overcooking the carrots as some recipes suggest maintaining their moisture and natural sweetness, and the sugar was replaced with raisins. I served it up to my daughter and SUCCESS! Her little eyes lit up with delight after the first mouthful as though it was her first trip to a sweet shop, she wanted more, and more. Then suddenly 'PING!'... Light bulb moment! I thought "WOW, she loved it! I'm going to write an Indian baby and toddler food cookery book!"

After the success of this recipe, I spent a period of months researching and detailing the health benefits of culinary spices, also known as ' **SuperSpices** ', **food groups** and ' **SuperFoods** ', to ensure I provided Aaliyah with all of the vitamins and minerals she needed for healthy growth and development. After collating this information, I experienced yet another 'PING!' Light bulb moment and came up with the concept of creating 'SuperMeals' for babies, toddlers and the whole family.

And that my fellow mummy, is the story of how this book came to be.

## What are 'SuperMeals'?

The 'Super' of SuperMeals refers to the extra health benefits associated with these meals over and above normal meals, due to the inclusion of carefully selected foods, SuperFoods and SuperSpices. When fused together they produce scrumptious meals, chock-full of nutritional value for babies and toddlers. In other words:

Regular Foods + SuperFoods + SuperSpices = SuperMeals

I've used my 'Banana and Cinnamon Roti Baaboro' recipe, as an example of how SuperMeals work in this cookery book:

Roti + Banana + Cinnamon = Baaboro  
(Regular Food) (SuperFood) (SuperSpice) (SuperMeal)

The roti (Indian flatbread or chapatti) fulfils the basic starchy food requirement to provide much needed energy for baby; the banana, an excellent high-energy fruit provides potassium vital for heart function, healthy muscle growth and helps the body to absorb calcium; the cinnamon contributes towards a healthy immune system, is great for digestion and brain function, as well as offers a warm, fragrant sweetness. All of these health benefits wrapped up into one tasty snack that your little one will wholeheartedly munch on. So rest assured I have created some simply delicious recipes that are **powerful, energy-packed and well-balanced SuperMeals**, boosting the antioxidant levels on your little one's colourful plastic plate.

## Who is this book for?

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Indian SuperMeals is a useful culinary guide for any parents looking to ditch the bland baby food, move on to yummy, adventurous baby food. Expectant mums (for future reference), new mums, existing mums with their second, third or fourth baby, stay at home dads, or anyone interested in Indian baby food.

It is essentially for any parents who not only want to provide their little ones with tasty, wholesome recipes; they are also interested learning about the health benefits of foods and spices for baby and the rest of the family. Making Indian SuperMeals a handy reference guide for years to come.

## How this book works

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Initially all vegetarian, meat, fish, dessert recipes (and so on) all have their own dedicated chapters. Purely because in the early stages of feeding, babies' requirements are very specific, and I want to share my experiences with you to ease any concerns you may have and offer other useful advice.

The earlier chapters are also formatted in this manner for convenience. For busy parents who want to select recipes (at a glance) from one or more chapters to ensure their little one is receiving a balanced diet; for parents who may have specific dietary requirements they wish to pass onto their little one i.e. vegetarian; or simply parents looking for the dessert chapter for a scrummy treat.

For these reasons, you'll notice that Stage 2 and Stage 3 recipes can be found alongside each other within these chapters.

As your little one progresses on to Stage 4: 1-3 years recipes, toddlers can eat pretty much everything and the specifics begin to diminish. For this reason all vegetarian, meat and fish meals are under the same chapter but are all clearly labelled for convenience.

By the way, throughout this book baby is referred to as 'she'. There is no reason for this other than I have a daughter, as you know, so for me it was the obvious choice.

## Feeding Stages

Recipes are suitable for **weaning babies aged from 7 months onwards**. There are no recipes aimed at Stage 1 (6 months plus) weaning babies simply because spices are not suitable for babies of this age. The feeding stages within this book include:

- **Stage 2: 7 months plus:** Babies ready for new textures, soft lumps, new tastes and flavours but introducing tiny amounts of spices to tempt curious little taste buds. Self-feeding also begins.
- **Stage 3: 10 months plus:** Older babies ready to progress to the next level of spice for more flavoursome meals. Meals are chunkier consisting of chopped food instead of mashed. Self-feeding continues.
- **Stage 4: 1-3 years:** Spice training complete. Toddlers ready for spicy family meals with some small changes.

Please note: Feeding stages are **loose guidelines and should not be referred to as strict timeframes** for recipe usage, as recipes can be adapted to reflect the relevant feeding stage of your little one. For example, I was feeding Aaliyah both Stage 2 and Stage 3 SuperMeals when she was 10 months old but simply increasing the level of spice in the Stage 2 recipes to reflect that of Stage 3 i.e. ¼ teaspoon of garlic was increased to ½ teaspoon or even 1 teaspoon, whilst following the same recipe.

I also left the food chunkier and served curries with accompaniments such as rice, roti, pitta bread and quinoa to make the meals more filling. I personally found this worked really well as Aaliyah had quite a few favourite meals in the Stage 2 recipes, so this enabled her to enjoy them for longer.

**IMPORTANT: Do not feed your little one any recipes earlier than the recommended start age.**

## Cooking Technique

The method in which most of these recipes are prepared differs from conventional Indian cooking that not everything is always thrown in the same pot to bubble away until tender. I altered my cooking technique accordingly to ensure I maintained as many nutrients as possible when cooking fruit and vegetables. Therefore you'll notice within many recipes the fruit and vegetables are either steamed separately and added to the meal at the end, or are dropped into the pot to cook with everything else at the last possible moment to ensure they are not overcooked.

## About the Recipes

Choose from yummy vegetable, meat or fish curries, desserts and finger foods as your little one graduates from one feeding stage and onto the next. Some are **traditional Indian recipes with a twist**, such as my scrumptious 'Chicken and Saag (spinach) Pasanda with Grapes', 'Butternut Squash and Apricots and Dhal (lentil) Curry', or for dessert, 'Apple and Pear Jardo (sweet rice)' to name just a few.

Others are **inspired by World cuisine but with an Indian twist**, such as my mouth-watering 'Indian Vegetable Paella', 'Pizza Pitta Fingers' and a twist on the British classic 'Desi Mac 'n' Cheese with Tuna'. All guaranteed to leave your little one with a very full and satisfied tummy.

**NOTE: There is no-added salt, sugar or chilli in any recipes.**

## Feeding Baby New Meals — What to Expect

I know how exciting (and also frustrating) offering new meals to baby can be. Enthusiastically I cook up a storm in the kitchen and when Aaliyah's meal was ready, I'd put her in her high chair (armed with bib), spoon-feed her, her first mouthful and wait in anticipation for her response; like a contestant on MasterChef waiting for the judge's approval.

In my experience, I found her initial responses to be quite extreme. She either loved her meal straight away gobbling up the whole bowl, or she'd push the food out with her tongue. When she did this I felt quite disheartened, thinking 'oh no, what if I'm a terrible cook and she can't tell me!'

As time went on, I realised although she appeared not to enjoy some meals, when I offered them to her again either later the same day or another day, she happily devoured the whole bowl. As she had already experienced the initial taste, the taste and texture was not a surprise to her anymore.

Now Aaliyah eats almost everything and loves her food which is great for family meal time and for holidays away from home. In fact, she is very enthusiastic about trying new types of food which is amazing and a huge relief for me. I like to think in her mind:

***Food from mummy = yummy food for me to eat***

So stay strong and persevere.

If your little one does seem to reject the meals you have prepared either using your own recipes, or from using recipes in this cookery book, offer the meals again at another time, as she may develop a taste for it later whether it be it a week or months' time.

Following the food spitting, turning away from food and spoon pushing, rest assured all recipes have now been approved and awarded gold stars by my little Princess Aaliyah, and her little friends, the toughest of all food critics.

# SUPERSPICES

*SuperSpices, used for medicinal purposes and general well-being for babies, children and adults across different cultures for generations.*

## What are SuperSpices?

'SuperSpices' is the term awarded to culinary spices due to their remarkable health promoting properties and potent antioxidant levels. A concept recently supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). After examining antioxidant activity of specific foods, fruit, vegetables and spices amongst others, they found culinary spices such as cloves, cinnamon and turmeric are bursting with powerful antioxidants that have an even higher level than some of the more popular SuperFoods such as blueberries and avocados. See Pyramid.

Antioxidant levels - SuperSpices vs SuperFoods



Adapted from: USDA Database for the Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity (ORAC) of Selected Foods, Release

- NOTES:
- Fruit and vegetables towards the bottom of the pyramid are still SuperFoods therefore will contain a higher level of nutrients over regular foods.
  - Does not represent the entire list of foods within the report. Only the most popular SuperFoods have been selected for comparison purposes.
  - Further research is underway to determine whether and how SuperSpice antioxidant levels benefit human health.

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Consuming antioxidants is massively important for our health to protect our bodies against free radical cell damage. Free radicals are unstable, highly reactive molecules triggered by pollution, pesticides in food, alcohol, smoking and excess fat consumption, causing serious diseases such as heart disease, cancer, strokes, Alzheimer's disease and arthritis later in life.

Spices also possess anti-inflammatory properties which protect us from infections, allergies, asthma and more. In fact research has shown holy basil has anti-inflammatory action comparable to the common painkiller Ibuprofen, offering yet another reason why spices have been awarded with the 'SuperSpice' status.

## SuperSpices in Baby Food - The 'Official' View

Using spices in baby food seems to be a relatively new subject at the moment. There's an abundance of 'official' advice available through the internet, books and health care services focussing on introducing solid food to babies.

A great starting point but official 'rulebooks' mostly ignore the use of spices in home-cooked baby food. If it is not included in the official advice this does not imply that you cannot use spices in baby food. It is important to remember these are only recommendations and guidelines. There are no solid procedures you must follow as a parent. So go ahead and **throw out the rulebook**! You know your baby best so go with what feels right for you and your little one.

Nevertheless, there has been a breakthrough! Western attitudes towards using spices in baby food are changing; and the fact that the differences are cultural rather than based on scientific findings is coming to the forefront.

With both Eastern and Western culture under my belt I can tell you from first-hand experience the difference is entirely cultural. I was born and raised in England, but my family originates from India. As a child, my mum fed me and my sister's spicy curries with roti and rice from a very young age. This was the first food I ate even before I was introduced to simple foods like sandwiches when I started school.

## Feeding Baby SuperSpices: A Good Idea?

Absolutely! Despite the fact research is currently on-going to understand exactly if and how, the antioxidant levels in SuperSpices works to improve health, they do possess a number of other distinct advantages. Some of which I will explore now.

## Unique Health Benefits

Each SuperSpice has its own unique health benefits all members of the family can take advantage of. I have outlined the advantages for the core spices I use in my recipes, so you can see how beneficial spices will be in your little one's diet.

### Black Pepper

Helps to settle indigestion, constipation, and reduce pain in toothaches.

### Cardamom

Prevents colds and flu (influenza), analgesic properties treat teeth and gums, throat infections, prevents flatulence, and treats asthma and bronchitis.

### Cinnamon

Analgesic properties to help reduce pain in toothaches, aids digestion, treats diarrhoea, strengthens the immune system to cure colds, boosts memory and cognitive function, balances blood sugar level (type 2 diabetes).

### Cloves

Antiseptic properties help to fight against colds and flu, bronchitis and athlete's foot. Treats flatulence and boosts digestion. Analgesic properties reduce pain in toothaches, boost memory and blood circulation.

### Coriander

Aids digestion, treats diarrhoea, provides iron to help prevent anaemia, and protects skin against eczema and dryness.

### Cumin

Supports the development of a healthy immune system, improves oxygen distribution, betters digestion, boosts metabolism, and improves absorption of nutrients.

### Paprika

Antibiotic properties help protect against bacterial infections such as tonsillitis, improves blood circulation and aids digestion.

## Turmeric

Anti-bacterial properties help to prevent infection in wounds and cuts, aids digestion, reduce flatulence, boost immune system function for cold and flu protection and reduced risk of developing childhood leukaemia.

## Aromatic, Tasty Food

Our sense of taste and smell are very closely linked. So much so, that food would taste bland without our sense of smell. Spices release a delicious aroma when cooked making the food tastier when eaten. A wonderful alternative to adding salt and sugar into baby's food. They will help you create incredibly tasty meals that your little one will whole heartedly enjoy.

## 'SuperSpicy' Breast Milk

Did you know if you have been, or are currently breastfeeding, your little one will have tasted the foods and spices you have been eating? Subtle tastes pass through breast milk and straight into baby's tummy. As spices are already a familiar taste, why not add a pinch of spices in with her solid food?

## Family Meal Training

If your family meals are already quite spicy, introducing spices in small amounts and gradually will be milder on her little tummy, rather than going from 0 to 100% in one go. Great spice preparation for the big family meals that await her.

## No Fussy Eaters Please!

Spices are extremely versatile! Changing one spice in a dish will alter the taste completely. This versatility suggests you can offer a wider variety of food to your little one. More variety in your little one's diet now will help to keep a fussy eater at bay later.

So put the bland food away, and start spicing up that baby food!

## Which SuperSpices are Safe to Use in Baby Food?

Most are safe to use in baby's diet in fresh, ground or dried varieties, provided they are introduced in the correct manner ( [see here](#) for details). Below is an idea of the spices you can introduce although there are more, including chilli powder! Feel free to experiment with them (and others) to uncover new and exciting meals for baby.

Basil	Garlic powder	Pepper (black & white)
Cardamom	Ginger (ground)	Rosemary
Cinnamon	Mint	Saffron
Cloves	Nutmeg	Sage
Coriander	Oregano	Thyme
Cumin	Paprika	Turmeric
Dill	Parsley	Vanilla

## When is it Safe to Introduce SuperSpices to Baby?

From 7 to 8 months of age, when your little one is comfortable eating solid food. Through personal experience, I introduced spices into Aaliyah's diet from 7 months of age. I had no problems and she absolutely loved her food chowing down on all her meals.

## How Should I Introduce SuperSpices to Baby?

Firstly, follow the **'four day rule'** to ensure your little one is not allergic to any new spices you have introduced i.e. introduce a cooked spice with food, and wait four days before introducing another one to ensure there are no allergic reactions. I did this by lightly cooking the spice in olive oil and adding it to freshly cooked mashed potato.

Whilst allergic reactions to spices are uncommon, they can occur. So keep an eye out for tummy upsets, skin rashes, swelling of the lips and face, runny and blocked noses, sneezing, itchy watery eyes, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Please be particularly cautious if you have a family history of allergic reactions to specific spices.

You can also **consult with your doctor or health visitor before introducing new spices into your little one's diet.**

Secondly, introduce spices using just a **pinch at a time**. All of my recipes suitable for Stage 2: 7 months plus babies are created with this in mind. The food may taste bland to you and I, but a pinch really is enough at this stage. It's amazing what new taste buds can detect!

## SUPERFOODS AND FOOD GROUPS

*So we've discovered SuperSpices are a fantastic addition to your little one's meals for enhancing taste.*

and for her general health. However, we must not forget to look at major foods SuperSpices should be consumed with to gain optimal health benefits at mealtimes.

## What are SuperFoods?

All foods contain some nutritional value which will be beneficial to baby, however, there are other foods naturally chock-full with an even **HIGHER amount of nutrients**. **These foods have been coined 'SuperFoods'**, as they are known to have extra health benefits. As with SuperSpices they contain antioxidants; however these antioxidants have been scientifically proven to benefit health, making them hugely important for baby's well-being and for fighting off diseases.

SuperFoods are the healthy start babies need and can be found within every food group.

## FOOD GROUPS: GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT FOR BABY

### Estimated Average Requirements (EAR) for energy:

7 to 9 months: boys 825kcal, girls 765kcal per day

10 to 12 months: boys 920kcal, girls 865kcal per day

(Source: Department of Health, Dietary Reference values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the UK)

Between the ages of 8 and 9 months, your little one's diet should consist of 3 balanced meals a day. As she grows and requires more energy, this should gradually increase to 3 balanced meals and 2 healthy snacks per day.

There are four major food groups outlined below baby must consume to attain her recommended calorie intake, and to achieve a balanced diet. A balanced diet ensures your little one gets all of the vitamins and minerals she needs to grow into a healthy adult.

Food Groups	Baby's Serving Amount (per day)
Carb-Rich (Starches)	3-4 servings
Fruit and Vegetables	3-4 servings
Milk and Dairy foods	3 servings
Protein-Rich	1-2 servings

### Carb-Rich (Starches)

Being one of the largest food groups also makes it one of the most important. Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta, fortified breakfast cereals; rice, roti's and cous cous are all included under the starchy food umbrella. Providing your little one with valuable nutrients, fibre and much-needed energy to crawl, walk and play.

Potatoes are not classified as a vegetable portion due to their high starch content. So if you do feed your little one potato, include some other vegetables along with her meal.

From 9 months onwards, feed your little one **three to four servings of starchy foods per day** .

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### **SuperFoods: Whole Grains**

Whole grains such as wholemeal bread, whole wheat pasta, brown rice and wholemeal cereals are the SuperFoods of this group. They are antioxidant, anti-cancer; keep the heart healthy, high in fibre and rich in complex carbohydrates. Complex carbohydrates break down to produce glucose (a type of sugar) when transported around the body via the blood stream is transformed into energy.

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Although whole grain varieties are nutritionally better, feeding your little one too many high fibre foods can stop the absorption of important minerals such as iron and calcium. Potentially leading to anaemia later in life and affecting mental and physical growth. They can also fill up your little one's tummy before she's eaten the necessary amount of calories required for healthy growth. With both points in mind, I opted to feed Aaliyah a combination of white and whole grain varieties of starchy foods, as they both contain complex carbohydrates.

### **Fruit and Vegetables**

Nature has provided us with a vast array of delicious and colourful fruit and vegetables, each containing unique vitamins, minerals and fibre essential to our health. Being another large food group, feel free to go fruit and veg crazy because this group is bursting at the seams with SuperFoods. So take advantage of these natural sources and **feed your little one a rainbow** of as many different coloured fruit and vegetables as you can, to ensure you are giving your little one a balanced diet.

Fruit and vegetables don't always need to be fresh; give them a try in dried, canned or frozen varieties.

Feed your little one fruit and vegetables in each meal, **three to four servings per day** .

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### **SuperFoods: Fruit and Vegetables in the Rainbow**

Red	Cherries, grapes, guava, papaya, raspberries, red bell pepper, red/pink grapefruit, strawberries, tomatoes, watermelon.
Yellow / Orange	Apricots, cantaloupe melons, carrots, lemons, mangoes, oranges, peaches, pumpkins, squash, sweet potatoes.
Green	Asparagus, avocados, broccoli, cabbage, kale, lettuce, peas, spinach, watercress.
Blue / Purple	Aubergine, beets, blackberries, blueberries, grapes, plums, prunes, raisins, raspberries.
White	Apples, bananas, cauliflower, garlic, ginger, mushrooms, onions, potatoes.

## RED



Lycopene is a nutrient and part of the carotenoid family, a group of naturally occurring plant pigments. Therefore, the crimson and vibrant pillar box red colour of certain fruit and vegetables can be attributed to this carotenoid.

Lycopene, currently one of the most powerful antioxidants in food is believed to help prevent heart disease and reduce several types of cancer. The most concentrated source is found in tomatoes. However, the tomatoes must be cooked in order for the body to absorb lycopene more efficiently. Great news as Indian cuisine involves heavy usage of tomatoes when cooking curries. Used in fresh

pureed or tinned varieties, all of which when cooked are great sources of lycopene for your little one.

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It is also worth knowing tinned tomatoes contain an even higher antioxidant level than fresh, cooked tomatoes! So there's no need to feel guilty about grabbing a tin of chopped tomatoes from the cupboard if you're short for time, it will actually be better for your family's health. Just be aware excess consumption of lycopene, although harmless, can lead to a yellow liver and skin!

Lycopene, although found in small quantities, is also present in numerous SuperSpices such as chili powder, paprika, cinnamon, black pepper, oregano, garlic powder and curry powder.

## ORANGE AND YELLOW



Beta-carotene, one of the most popular carotenoids is responsible for the orange and yellow pigments found in particular fruit and vegetables. Beta-carotene is important for baby for its antioxidant, anti-cancer and anti-aging properties (more for your information than your little ones) and when consumed, converted into vitamin A. Vitamin A is essential for healthy vision and skin, and for boosting immune system function to protect against cold and flu viruses.

Beta-carotene is also found in less 'orange' vegetables such as spinach and red leaf lettuce. Likewise, it can be found in SuperSpices, dried basil, parsley, oregano, sage and ground coriander.

Citrus fruits, oranges and lemons are an excellent concentrated source of vitamin C, rather than vitamin A. Vitamin C is antioxidant and although doesn't cure the common cold, prevents further complications such as pneumonia from occurring.

## GREEN



Although coloured by the plant pigment 'chlorophyll', it's the carotenoids lutein and zeaxanthin found in the green group that are beneficial to health. Lutein and zeaxanthin are antioxidant and generally found in dark leafy green vegetables. They are also found in less 'green' places such as egg yolks, grapes, corn and in different varieties of squash. A diet rich in lutein and zeaxanthin can keep eyes healthy, leading to a reduced risk of cataracts later in life.

Green vegetables (and other vegetables) from the cruciferous family, broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower; are linked to research suggesting they are anti-cancer and high in vitamins A, C and other vitamins such as folate.

Folate, and other B vitamins, are necessary for the production of red blood cells and are essential for converting food into energy, which your little one will need for running around. Folate in particular, is also important for producing and maintaining new cells which is essential for healthy growth during infancy.

## **BLUE AND PURPLE**



Coloured by the plant pigment anthocyanins, found in blueberries, black grapes and black raspberries to name just a few. Research proves this carotenoid is a powerful antioxidant helping to prevent certain types of cancer. It similarly plays a role in preventing diseases such as diabetes, dementia, stroke and heart disease.

This group furthermore contains vitamin C, fibre, lutein, zeaxanthin and other antioxidants, ellagic acid and flavonoids. Flavonoids are mainly found in dark grapes, blueberries and red berries although also present in garlic and onions. Both flavonoids and ellagic acid are believed to have anti-cancer properties.

## WHITE



Garlic, white potatoes and onions are just a few members of the white group to provide exceptional

health benefits for your little one.

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Garlic includes the compound 'allicin', the main reason for its many health promoting abilities. It is believed to be anti-cancer, prevent heart disease, and reduce cholesterol and blood pressure. Garlic also possesses antibiotic and anti-viral properties helping to protect against cold and flu viruses. In fact, garlic has so many health benefits entire books have been dedicated to this smelly (and yet very flavoursome) little herb, and due to its unique flavour is widely used in Indian cookery.

Root ginger, another potent herb (or spice) from the white group is also used frequently in Indian cookery. Great for aiding digestion, treating fever from coughs and colds and is useful for treating arthritis.

White potatoes (in addition to being a starchy food) are an excellent source of potassium. Potassium is not only vital to heart function; it is a mineral essential for the entire body ensuring all cells, tissues and internal organs are kept in excellent working order. Another major source of potassium from the white group is bananas.

As well as containing flavonoids, onions are high in vitamin C; they are anti-cancer, and anti-inflammatory helping to protect the body against infections and allergies. Onions are heavily used in Indian cookery and form the base of most curry sauces.

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So we've reached the end of the rainbow and you can see there are unquestionable benefits to eating a range of different coloured fruit and vegetables; all providing your little one with unique vitamins and minerals essential for a well-balanced diet.

## **Milk and Dairy foods**

This group includes all **full-fat dairy** produce, whole milk, cheese, yogurt, fromage frais and custard. All great sources of vitamin A and calcium, key to building strong teeth and bones. With the exception of whole milk, all are safe to introduce into your little one's diet from 6 months.

Whole milk **MUST NOT** be introduced into baby's diet as a main drink prior to the age of one, because it lacks the right balance of nutrients, vitamins and minerals. Continue with either breast or formula milk until your little one's first birthday. Whole milk can, however, be used in cooking prior to the age of one.

Feed your little one **three servings per day of her usual milk** to ensure she has the correct amount of calcium required for healthy growth.

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## **SuperFoods: Yogurt**

Yogurt was awarded its SuperFood status due to its probiotic properties which provide healthy

bacteria for the gut. Gut health and good digestion are both linked to the overall health of the immune system, so it is imperative both are kept in good working order to give your little one the opportunity to fight off viruses and infections naturally.

Yogurt is furthermore high in iodine, necessary for healthy thyroid gland function. The thyroid gland supplies hormones to the body to control growth and metabolism, vital for weight control. It is similarly rich in calcium, protein and is easily digestible.

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### **Protein-Rich**

This group includes: lean red meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts and pulses (e.g. beans, lentils and peas) and foods made from pulses (e.g. tofu, hummus and soya foods).

Protein is essential for healthy growth because it lives in every cell and tissue in our body i.e. hair, muscle, skin, nails. Proteins are composed of different combinations of 20 amino acids; broken down into 'essential' and 'non-essential' amino acids.

Eight 'essential' amino acids must be consumed through food as our bodies cannot produce them naturally. The other twelve 'non-essential' amino acids can be produced daily by our bodies.

The protein-rich group therefore provides fundamental sources of eight 'essential' amino acids required by adults, and a further seven required by children to sustain and repair muscles, blood vessels, bones and internal organs. The group also supplies the essential mineral iron, required for producing red blood cells to carry oxygen around the body. A lack of iron can lead to anaemia later in life.

Meat and fish are excellent sources of B vitamins and supply another essential mineral, zinc; required for good sense of taste and smell and for healing cuts and wounds quickly and effectively. Exactly what your little one will need when she starts running around, causing mischief!

Feed your little one, **one or two servings from this group every day** .

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### **SuperFoods: Oily Fish**

Oily Fish are SuperFoods not only due to their high-quality protein and zinc content, but they also contain essential omega 3 fatty acids. Omega 3 fatty acids must be consumed through food, found in tuna, salmon and mackerel amongst other seafood; required for good brain function, growth and development and for keeping the heart healthy. They are too believed to be anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer.

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### **Fats, Salt, Sugar, Oils**

A fifth group exists that babies should not be exposed to, comprised of sugary foods or foods high

saturated fats. Fats are essential for providing concentrated energy in children under the age of two provided they are unsaturated, healthy fats (good fats), such as whole milk, yogurt, cheese, oily fish and lean cuts of meat. Saturated fats (bad fats) such as burgers, fried chips or sugary cakes and biscuits should be avoided.

Salt should be avoided as it can damage a baby's kidneys due to their immature digestive system. In the first 6 months babies need less than 1g of salt per day which they usually get from breast milk or formula milk. Between 7 to 12 months this increases to 1g per day.

Equally, sugar must be avoided as it can damage a baby's growing teeth. Sometimes before their teeth have even emerged! It also gives babies excess energy leading to a higher risk of growing into obese and overweight children, leading to health problems later in life. Babies get their sugar from natural sources such as fruits, vegetables and their usual milk.

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### **SuperFoods: Olive Oil**

Olive oil, although should be used sparingly when preparing your little one's meals is a SuperFood. Research has shown the monounsaturated fat found in olive oil is good for the heart. Likewise, it is rich in antioxidants and contains the naturally occurring property 'oleocanthal', which is anti-inflammatory. With this in mind, olive oil is used in the majority of my recipes. Other oils you can use include soya and rapeseed oil (aka vegetable oil). Alternatively you can cook with ghee (clarified butter) commonly used within Indian cooking.

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## **FOOD GROUPS: GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT FOR TODDLER**

### **Estimated Average Requirements (EAR) for energy:**

1 to 3 years: boys 1,230kcal, girls 1,165kcal per day

(Source: Department of Health, Dietary Reference values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the UK.)

From the age of 1 year, your little one's diet should consist of 3 balanced meals and 2 healthy snacks per day to achieve her required calorie intake.

When your little one reaches the budding age of two, she will still need to consume 3 meals and 2 snacks per day, although her serving requirement from each food group will change. Up to the age of five her diet will take a gradual shift towards that of an adult. So, from the age of two the UK 'eatwell plate' can be applied to your little one's diet.

# The eatwell plate

Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.



The eatwell plate is a handy visual guide to assist you in understanding how much of what your little one eats comes from each food group, including all of her snack requirements. An extensively tested model by the Department of Health, it represents how different foods contribute towards the overall balance of a healthy diet for an adult or child. An excellent tool you can refer to for the whole family.

Depending on what mood your little one is in, she may binge on food one day and barely eat anything the next. So use the eatwell plate as a guide to achieve a healthy balanced diet over a period of time, i.e. a week rather than a day, and continue offering nutrient-rich foods, and new tastes and textures where you can to keep food interesting.

## Bread, Rice, Potatoes, Pasta and other Starchy foods

The food group I refer to as 'Carb-Rich (Starches)'.

Eat plenty. At least one third of your little one's food intake should be starchy foods. Continue feeding her a combination of white and wholemeal varieties of starchy food to ensure she gets the correct amount of calories required for healthy growth and slow release energy.

## Fruit and Vegetables

Fruit and vegetables make up another third of your little one's food requirements. So eat plenty and increase her servings gradually from three to four per day to at least **five servings per day**. One serving equates to the amount your little one can hold in her hand.

As she grows, continue feeding her a rainbow of as many different coloured fruit and vegetables in

each meal as you can to maintain her balanced diet.

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## **Milk and Dairy foods**

Dairy is no longer a huge part of your little one's diet, but she will need to eat some.

Between the ages of 2 to 3 years, continue offering her three servings of calcium per day. This can be achieved through 300ml (half a pint) of milk offered throughout the day with meals. Or by serving one glass of milk, and later offering some other dairy foods. Also, from the age of 2 years, provided she is not underweight and is growing well, you can move your little one onto semi-skimmed milk, if you wish.

As your little one approaches 5 years, choose lower fat alternatives where possible to avoid unnecessary weight gain, or offer higher fat versions infrequently or in smaller amounts.

## **Meat, Fish, Eggs, Beans and other Non-Dairy Sources of Protein**

The food group I refer to as 'Protein-Rich'.

Eat some. Continue to cook with lean servings of meat where possible as these contain lower amounts of fat. Alternatively, eat higher fat versions infrequently or in smaller amounts.

Feed your little one at least **two servings of fish per week**, including **one serving of oily fish**.

## **Foods and Drinks High in Fat and/or Sugar**

Eat just a small amount. By this stage your little one will no doubt have been introduced to a few sweet treats either by yourself or by members of the family. Try to keep these to a minimum served only after a main meal to avoid tooth decay and unnecessary weight gain. Alternatively you can offer my Sweet SuperMeals as a healthy means to satisfy your little one's sweet tooth.

Likewise, salt should be kept to a minimum. Toddlers aged 1 to 3 years need less than 2g per day.

## **FOODS TO AVOID AND POTENTIAL ALLERGENS**



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