

## The Downsides of Baby Food Pouches (And How to Use Them Right)

There can be a time and place for pouches. They can be an emergency supply. If you're stuck in a car with without a packed lunch. Or if they just need a snack.

But you should not rely on puree pouches every day and definitely not every meal.

Here's why:

- 1.) Labels may be misleading. Even if the front label proudly proclaims ingredients like kale and quinoa, rest assured that the ingredient list (the smallish print next to the nutritional information on the back) will start with a cheaper component -- apple, pear, or carrot puree in most cases. This cheaper puree provides the bulk of the pouch's contents. How much quinoa or kale is in there? No one knows since the manufacturers are not required to declare the percentages. (Beech-Nut, however, has begun listing the percentages on its website and is considering including them on packaging within the next year.)
- 2.) Sucking purees from pouches does not promote the healthy development of feeding skills. Pouches encourage more sucking -- something that babies do very well already. In my nutrition practice I have seen many babies "stuck" in a puree phase. They had trouble progressing to lumps and finger foods because the parents relied on pouches for too long. Their child missed the window of opportunity to learn how to handle varied textures and self-feed. Studies show that the late introduction of lumpy food has been associated with feeding problems in the future.
- 3.) Purees from pouches do not help to expand the palate. Most of them taste sweet, even those with kale, spinach, whole grains, and other generally not-sweet tasting ingredients. Kids already love sweet. Our goal as parents is to help babies develop a taste for the foods they do not like yet, such as savory vegetables, grains, and meats.

No one can argue that purees in pouches are a perfect fit for our crazy busy lives. And although not an adequate substitute for fresh fruit and veggies, purees in pouches still have a decent amount of nutrition and can provide much-needed vitamins and minerals, especially important for children with feeding difficulties.

Here are some ways every parent and child can enjoy the convenience of purees in pouches without contributing to potential feeding problems later on:

- Instead of letting babies and children suck on puree pouches, empty the puree into a bowl and feed it with a spoon.
- Alongside with offering purees, make sure to expose your baby to finger foods from early on. If introducing finger foods from 6 months, serve long graspable pieces of soft foods like mango or avocado, long strips of well-cooked chicken or meat, steamed or roasted veggie sticks, or long pieces of toast. When babies develop finger grasp close to 8-9 months, switch to small bites of well cooked vegetables, soft fruits, eggs, meats, beans and shredded cheese.

- Try not to rely on pouches at every meal, and instead ensure that there is a variety of textures in your baby's diet. An example of a meal with different textures appropriate for babies from 6-8 months is a soft chicken and vegetable stew, mango chunks, and avocado mashed with a fork.
- Do not let older babies and toddlers walk around while sucking on the pouches. Make meals and snacks sit-down occasions. This will reduce the risk of choking and help children become mindful eaters who pay attention to their food and stop when full.
- Introduce more challenging vegetables like leafy greens and broccoli as single-ingredient purees or finger foods rather than mixed with sweet purees so that your baby learns to like their flavor.

Purees in pouches can be a nutritious addition to our kids' diets and a lifesaving solution for parents. But it is important to integrate them mindfully in eating without compromising the development of eating skills and taste preferences.

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