

LifeToday

Make your own baby food



Chef Lisa Colaso has created a range of recipes that will ensure your children have a healthy start to life, writes **Primrose Skelton**

Convenience food, even for babies has become very popular in today's hectic lifestyle. But not all of it is as good or as healthy as you think, and parents often do not know exactly what it contains.

Experts believe that home-made baby food is the best source of wholesome food because parents have total control over the content. "You know it's free of additives and preservatives and you take the extra steps to ensure only high quality products are selected," says Lisa Colaso, a baking instructor who runs cooking classes in Dubai.

During a workshop at Cooking Sense - a new cookery school, based at Media City - parents learnt how to prepare healthy and nutritious baby food at home by incorporating the right foods for their age.

Nutritionist Mary Kerich was on hand to suggest ingredients and food groups to mums who want to create their own recipes.

"Non-wheat cereals, fruit, vegetables and potatoes are suitable for first weaning foods," she says.

"But between six and nine months the amount and variety of foods should be increased to include meat, fish, eggs, all cereals and pulses."

ESSENTIAL FOODS

As Lisa starts chopping vegetables, Mary explains why these are essential items in baby food.

"Vegetables provide complex fibre that helps with the digestive system. They are also full of vitamins and minerals that encourage healthy skin," she says.

"But parents must be aware that not all vegetables are good

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to give a child the best diet

for babies. They must not be given spinach or beetroot as these contain a lot of iron. They are natural antioxidant that detox the system; great for adults but not for growing youngsters."

All the recipes being prepared have the right balance between proteins, fats, carbohydrates, minerals, vitamins and fibre. "It is essential for babies to have the right food that provides each of these things," explains Mary, who is based at the Dubai Herbal and Treatment Centre.

But she warns parents to stay away from certain foods because they can actually have a negative affect on babies' development.

She says: "Sweeteners like sugar and honey are not good. Honey is bad for the digestive system, and sugar stunts the development of teeth.

"Soya and soya-based products are also a no-go area because they have too much oestrogen in them and salt and spices should be avoided because babies do not have fully-developed taste buds to pick up the flavours."

Mother-of-one Manuela Biedenkopf has come along to take

and protein, as well as providing fibre and vitamins," she says.

"None of these recipes are bland. I try to use natural products like herbs and vegetables such as celery for flavour.

"They are quick and easy to make, so it doesn't take up the whole day."

As the participants get under way with preparing the food, Mary explains to them why homemade baby food is a necessity in the early years. "Nowadays there are so many children who suffer from allergies, such as milk and wheat, this is often because their parents have fed them the wrong food in the early years.

"The recipes we are advising mothers to make will help their babies grow and aid in bone and skin development," she says.

FAMILY MEALS

Chef Lisa believes that the whole family can enjoy the same meal with a few small changes.

"If you like to cook spicy food, like a chicken curry for example, just prepare the meat and vegetables as you normally would but without adding spices or seasoning. These are not good for babies and should not be introduced for the first few years of their life.

"Also, try to chop the vegetables very small, they cook better and are easier to puree, if that's what you want to do."

"If you use onions, stick to white ones rather than red, as these are too strong.

"Lentils and chickpeas are great for babies, so make your own houmous. Garlic is good too, just don't add too much.

"If you want to add flavour to a meal use ginger, thyme or basil, but remember to use the ginger in a big block and take it out before you serve the meal as it is very chewy for a small child."

Mary advises parents to try and balance the meal as much as possible and to chop and change, rather than sticking to the same thing every day. "Babies like variety as much as adults," she says.

"Babies should not be given too much fat either, but a small amount of grated cheese, full-fat yoghurt and bananas are OK."

Many of the recipes Lisa makes can be prepared in advance, making it easy for busy mothers – something Manuela is pleased about. "It's good to see that these meals don't take very long and they are something all the family can enjoy with a little tweaking," she says.



Manuela, right, samples some of the new dishes she has learnt to cook at Lisa's workshop

DEENIS B MALLARI

“The recipes will help babies grow and aid bone development”

part in the course because her 11-month-old daughter Emily is a "fussy eater".

"Even at this early stage she won't eat much. She likes her breakfast, which is usually cereal-based, and she eats dried apricots and plums but when it comes to lunch and dinner she doesn't seem to like anything.

"I came along to learn how I can wean her off the pureed cereal and on to something a little more tasty and healthy."

CHANGING RECIPES

Manuela wants to use more fresh ingredients in her cooking and wants to know how to spice up food without adding salt or spices.

The first item Lisa prepares is fresh fish and pasta. Mary explains why this is a healthy meal for a baby. "It has the right balance between carbohydrate

» RECIPES FOR BABY FOOD

FISH WITH PASTA

- 2tbsp macaroni
- Half a carrot boiled with the pasta
- 4-5 beans finely cut
- 2 pieces of celery cut finely
- 50g fleshy fish, such as haddock or perch filleted



- Wash the macaroni, put all the vegetables together with the macaroni and half a cup of water and put to boil on slow heat. Add the fish when the vegetables are half done. Cook for a further 10 minutes, until the fish is well done. Puree the food if required.

LENTILS WITH RICE

- 1 tbsp red lentils (masoor dal)
- 1tbsp yellow moong beans
- 2 tbsp rice
- 1 whole clove of garlic
- Half a piece of ginger
- Half a tomato deseeded and skinned
- Half a chopped white onion
- Pinch of turmeric powder

- Wash and soak the lentils and rice together for half an hour. Pour in a cup of water and put on to boil adding the other ingredients. Boil on slow heat until the lentils are well cooked. Remove the ginger and garlic and puree together.



MIXED VEGETABLES

- Half a carrot finely chopped
- 1 potato peeled and finely chopped
- Small slice of pumpkin or squash skinned and chopped
- 1 zucchini, peeled and deseeded, finely chopped

- 5-6 beans finely chopped
- A few chives cut up for flavour

- Boil all the ingredients together with half to one cup of water on a slow fire until well done. Mash together and serve when cool.



CHICKEN SOUP

- 1 chicken breast boneless and skinless cut into cubes
- 1 tomato deseeded and skinned
- Half a chopped white onion
- 1 stick of celery finely chopped
- 1 clove of garlic, whole
- 1 piece of ginger cut in half
- 1 stick of cinnamon
- 2 cloves of garlic

- Boil all the ingredients together until well done. Remove the ginger and the celery, puree and serve as a soup. This can also be cooked with pasta or rice and the chicken can be shredded after cooking.

BANANA AND YOGHURT

- Mash a banana and mix into a small bowl of full cream yoghurt.



STEWED APPLE OR PEAR

- Half an apple or pear deseeded and skinned. Half a cup of water and a pinch or two of cinnamon powder.

- Cook for a short while and puree or leave the bits for bigger babies to chew on. This could also be mixed with the yoghurt and banana or it could also be cooked into oats for a porridge with either banana, pear or apple and cinnamon powder.

» BABY FOOD DOS AND DON'TS

- Do give them: Pureed potato/carrot/parsnip/turnip/cauliflower
- Mashed banana/apple/pear/apricot
- Plain natural unsweetened yoghurt
- Unsweetened custard – do not add sugar
- Lamb/chicken/fish
- Green beans/peas/lentils/broccoli/sprouts/tomatoes
- Cow's milk (after you have finished breast feeding)
- Pasta – from six months old

- Don't give them: Peanuts and peanut powder
- Sugar and honey
- Goats and sheep milk
- Tea and coffee
- Seeds and nuts
- Soya and soya products
- Salt and spices
- Beetroot and spinach
- Canned vegetables as they are usually loaded with sodium and additives
- High acidic fruits, such as oranges, tangerines and pineapples