

Go Nuts!

Experts now agree you can (and should) give nuts to babies and toddlers. But how do you do it safely—and get your kid to actually eat them? We crack the code.

TEXT BY CHERYL LOCK

RECIPES BY CATHERINE McCORD

Apple-Walnut Baby Puree

Place 2 cored, peeled, and cut up apples with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup shelled, halved walnuts in a steamer basket over boiling water. Cover and cook for 7 to 10 minutes, or until apples are fork tender. Then, place the apples, walnuts, $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. cinnamon, and 3 Tbs. water from the steamer in a food processor. Cover and process for 3 minutes or until smooth. Sprinkle the puree with $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. cinnamon. Makes 1 cup.

Nutrition per quarter cup
95 calories; 1g protein; 5g fat
(0 sat. fat); 14g carbs; 3g fiber;
13mg calcium; 0 iron; 1mg sodium

*
**4-6
MONTHS
& UP**

It's nerve-wracking to give your kid nuts for the first time. "I brought peanut butter to my 2-year-old son's checkup and made him eat a teeny bit in the doctor's office just in case he had an allergic reaction," says Dana Kessner, a senior financial analyst in Boca Raton, Florida.

"We don't have a family history of allergies, but all the news lately about nuts—school bans and warning labels on products—was freaking me out."

Even though Kessner's approach may seem unusual, message boards are filled with stories about kids getting their first taste of nuts in the E.R. parking lot or in front of a friend who is a nurse. What's more, some parents are waiting until their kids are in preschool or later to introduce them to tree nuts and peanuts (the latter are technically a legume, but they're often lumped in with nuts). "It's possible that waiting to give your kid nuts until he's 3 or 4 actually increases the chance of allergy development," says Robert Wood, M.D., director of pediatric allergy and immunology at Johns Hopkins Children's Center, in Baltimore. "Ninety-five percent of kids aren't going to develop a nut allergy no matter when nuts are introduced to them. One to 2 percent of kids will get it because they're genetically predisposed. For the remaining kids, timing may make a difference." In fact, nut-allergy rates are very low in certain areas of Africa, where a peanut soup is given to babies as they are weaned off of breast milk. Researchers are still exploring a possible connection.

Last year, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) changed its long-standing policy of avoiding ground nuts and foods containing nuts until age 3. Now the group says that parents can offer them to babies 6 months and up as long as they aren't showing signs of other food allergies and don't have a family history of nut allergies, says Jatinder Bhatia, M.D., chair of the Committee on Nutrition.



Chocolate-Hazelnut Pancakes

For your baby, tear pancakes into pieces and put a few teaspoons of sauce on her plate. Let her "paint" the pancakes in the sauce.

**1¼ cups all-purpose flour
2 tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. salt
¼ cup chocolate-hazelnut spread
1 egg
3 Tbs. sugar, divided
1¼ cups milk (use whole for babies and low-fat for older kids)
Canola oil
1 12-oz. package frozen raspberries
½ cup cold water
1 Tbs. cornstarch**

1 Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt. In another bowl, whisk chocolate-hazelnut spread, egg, 1 Tbs. sugar, and milk. Whisk milk mixture into flour mixture (it's okay if there are a few lumps).

2 Heat oil-coated skillet on medium. Pour in ¼ cup of batter. Cook 2 to 3 minutes. Turn when bubbles appear. Cook 1 to 2 minutes until brown on the bottom. **3** Put the raspberries and remaining sugar in pan (break up berries with a spoon). Heat on medium until bubbly. Mix water and cornstarch. Add to berry mixture. Stir and cook 2 minutes past when sauce thickens.

Strain seeds if desired.
Makes 10 pancakes and 1¾ cups sauce.

Nutrition per pancake with 1½ Tbs. sauce 151 calories; 4g protein; 4g fat (1g sat. fat); 26g carbs; 3g fiber; 117mg calcium; 1mg iron; 157mg sodium



Of course, whole nuts or spoonfuls of peanut butter are still a choking hazard, so avoid them until age 4. But ground nuts or nut butters baked into foods are not only fair game for babies and toddlers, they're also super nutritious. "Almost every type of nut will offer something great for your child," says Kerry Neville, R.D., a Seattle-based spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. Find out more about why (and how) you should introduce your little peanut to all kinds of nuts.

In a Nutshell

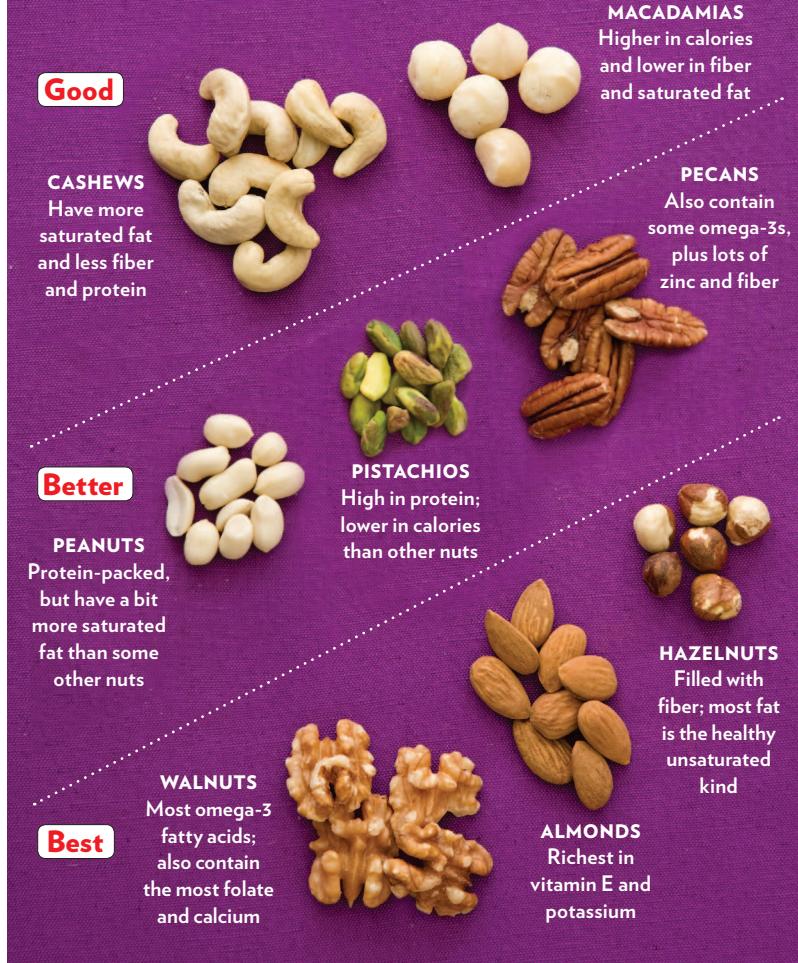
Kids under age 2 need about half of the calories in their diet to come from fat, and you can count on most types of nuts to help supply the healthy unsaturated kind. "Babies and toddlers both require a lot of fat for brain development," says David L. Katz, M.D., director and cofounder of the Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center, in Derby, Connecticut, and dad of five. "The unsaturated fats in nuts give the brain what it needs while helping maintain healthy cholesterol levels—even toddlers can have high cholesterol—as well as preventing inflammation, which has been linked to asthma, respiratory allergies, and type 1 diabetes."

Omega-3 fatty acids, the type of unsaturated fat in walnuts and, to a lesser extent, pecans, are especially valuable for the brain development of young kids. "Breast milk and many types of infant formula contain omega-3s, but it's found naturally only in a handful of foods, such as fish," says Melinda Johnson, R.D., a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. "Just seven walnut halves provide 57 percent of a 1- to 3-year-old child's daily needs."

Protein, fiber, zinc, and other nutrients in big demand by babies and toddlers are also abundant in nuts. A tablespoon of peanut butter supplies one quarter of the protein for 1- to 3-year-olds, while 12 almonds will kick in 10 percent of the

The Most Nutritious Nuts

Sure, all nuts are healthy, but certain types deliver more vitamins and minerals for the least amount of calories and saturated fat. Check out this guide from Yale nutrition expert David L. Katz, M.D., who developed the NuVal Nutritional Scoring System.



fiber. "If your child doesn't eat much meat or beans, nuts are another option," says Johnson. They're also a satisfying snack, says Kathy McManus, R.D., director of the department of nutrition at Brigham and Women's Hospital, in Boston. "Nuts are a better choice for kids than pretzels or animal crackers," she says. In those snacks, kids get refined carbohydrates and very little protein, which causes a spike in blood glucose levels, then a quick decrease of the same. The result: High-carb snackers may be hungry an hour later, while the nut eaters stay full longer.

A Pennsylvania State University study of nearly 5,000 children ages 2 to 19 seems to back that up. Children who ate peanuts or peanut butter had a better body mass index, a measure of weight in relation to height, than nut avoiders. "Kids who like peanuts may eat less throughout the day because nut products are a more satisfying snack," explains study author Penny M. Kris-Etherton, Ph.D., distinguished professor of nutrition at Penn State, in University Park. Her research also found that the peanut-eating kids took in more

protein, fiber, vitamin A, vitamin E, folate, calcium, magnesium, zinc, and iron than the no-nut group. "Their cholesterol levels were also an impressive 12 to 14 percent lower," says Dr. Kris-Etherton.

The Nuts and Bolts

Even knowing all the health benefits of nuts (and that the risk of allergies is low in the scheme of things), it can still be a little scary to take the plunge. Be cautious: Offer your child only a small amount the first time and do it in the morning on a day you'll be with your child so you can be on the lookout for symptoms of an allergic reaction, says Garry Gardner, M.D., chair of the AAP committee on injury, violence, and poison prevention. Common symptoms include wheezing, stomachache, vomiting, hives, and swelling; call your child's pediatrician if you notice a problem. If your child seems to be fine, offer slightly greater amounts of each over the next several days. After four or five days, he's in the clear. Try these tasty (and safe) ways you can serve nuts to your baby or toddler.

***Rely on nut butters.** "Stir a few tablespoons into pancake or muffin batter, or mix 1 to 2 teaspoons into oatmeal or rice cereal," says Suzanne Farrell, R.D., a dietitian in Denver.

***Go for the grind.** Stir a few teaspoons of ground nuts into the foods your child likes; for instance, mix some into yogurt or applesauce. For toddlers, use ground nuts as a delicious coating for your kid's favorite finger foods, such as fish sticks and chicken nuggets.

***Make a dip.** For toddlers, stir together equal parts nut butter and light cream cheese with a little milk for a dip you can serve with sliced bananas.

***Whip up a smoothie.** Blend together ½ cup milk, ¼ cup frozen fruit, and a few teaspoons of ground nuts for a fun drink that is appropriate for kids ages 1 and up. Just be sure to grind up the nuts first—otherwise, they will all sink to the bottom. □



12-18
MONTHS
& UP**

Pecan-Crusted Fish Sticks

Use Atlantic cod because it's not overfished or high in mercury.

Nonstick cooking spray
1 lb. cod fillets, rinsed and patted dry
1 cup pecan halves
1 cup torn whole-wheat bread pieces
½ tsp. salt
½ cup all-purpose flour
2 eggs, lightly beaten

1 Preheat oven to 450°F. Coat a wire baking rack with nonstick cooking spray and place on a baking sheet or in a shallow baking pan; set aside. Cut fish into about 14 3"x1" strips and set aside.

2 Place pecans, bread pieces, and salt in a food processor; pulse until fine. Place in small bowl. Put flour and eggs in separate bowls.

3 Lightly coat cod in flour. Dip in egg, and roll in pecan mixture. Put fish on rack; coat with cooking spray. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes or until golden. Makes 14 strips.

Nutrition per 2 strips 221 calories; 16g protein; 13g fat (2g sat. fat); 10g carbs; 2g fiber; 32mg calcium; 1mg iron; 244mg sodium

Pistachio Pesto

All ages will love this recipe. Cut up pasta for the baby, or use orzo or dot-shaped pastina.

1 cup packed spinach
½ cup olive oil
¼ cup shelled pistachio nuts
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
½ tsp. salt
1 clove garlic, quartered
12 oz. dried pasta, cooked and drained

1 Put spinach, oil, nuts, cheese, salt, and garlic in food processor. Process until smooth. Toss with pasta and serve. Makes 6 cups.

Nutrition per cup 361 calories; 10g protein; 16g fat (3g sat. fat); 44g carbs; 2g fiber; 60mg calcium; 2mg iron; 253mg sodium



12-18
MONTHS
& UP**