

Commercial baby food

What you need to know

This is a summary of key points from the very useful and interesting report into commercial baby foods by First Steps Nutrition Trust.

Food marketed as suitable from 4 months despite guidance to start solids around 6 months.

High free sugar content, including the 'savoury' options. Many use carrots, sweet potato, pear, plum and apple to sweeten savoury dishes.

Sugar content in purees is likely to be higher than on the label because processing breaks down the sugars.

Lack of evidence for claims of the number of fruit or vegetable portions contained.

Starch thickeners are used for texture & added to give bulk.

Name doesn't always reflect main ingredient.

Iron content is highly variable and is likely to be low due to low levels of meat and fish in many dishes.

Size of jar/packet may not reflect the portion size. May contain more than one portion.

Food with name that start with the meat or fish, 'Lamb hotpot' only needs to have 10% meat/fish content. If the name starts with something else such as 'Yummy lamb hotpot' or 'Carrot and lamb hotpot', it only needs to have 8% meat.

High-heat processing is likely to reduce micronutrient content.

Lack of evidence actually contain the number of fruit or vegetable portions stated.

Water content is not made explicit, and likely to be greater than if homemade.

Pouches often have high levels of fruit juice to help with the consistency, even in savoury dish.

Protein content is sufficient, but may need to eat a more, compared to homemade, to get the required amount.

Most foods were smooth, or smooth with soft lumps. Different in taste and texture than homemade and pass rapidly through the mouth, limiting appreciation of flavour. Food that can be rapidly swallowed may lead to overeating as make it more difficult for care giver to know when infant has had enough.

A number of foods aimed at babies under six months contained food that is not recommended for that age, including gluten, egg and cow's milk.

Energy content is highly variable, and many have a low energy density. However portions sizes may be large and give more than the requirements. Almost all the savoury meals and desserts for 10-12 months exceeded energy requirements for that age group.

Pouches: don't let child suck from pouch. It doesn't allow infant to see the food, can't tell how much they've had, doesn't help eating skills, and may lead to tooth decay. Also could lead to bacteria if reused.