

# Food Pouches – Topic of the Month

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This Topic of the Month was written with University of Minnesota School of Public Health, MPH student and dietetic intern Jenny McGowan.

## Food pouches

Food pouches are squeezable containers filled with pureed foods like fruits, vegetables, and other ingredients. They are often used as a quick and easy option for feeding young children, especially when families are on the go. While food pouches can be convenient, it is important to use them as part of a balanced approach to feeding. They are just one option for helping children get the nutrition they need. This topic of the month will focus on things parents need to know before using food pouches.

## Ingredients of food pouches

Food pouches are typically filled with pureed fruits, vegetables, or a combination of both. Some also include grains, yogurt, or proteins like chicken or beans, offering a variety of options for young children. Many pouches use simple, natural ingredients and are free from added sugars, making them an appealing choice for parents. However, some contain added sugars and other added ingredients, which can make them higher in calories. It is important to read labels carefully. Many pouches are fruit-based, with ingredients like apples or pears listed first, which can make them higher in natural sugars. This sweetness may mask the flavors of other ingredients, like spinach or kale, and limit a child's exposure to diverse tastes. Additionally, squeezable fruit and vegetables may lack the fiber that is important for digestive health.

## Importance of developing feeding skills

While food pouches can be a convenient part of a child's diet, relying on them too much may impact important developmental milestones. Learning to eat involves more than just getting nutrients. Building feeding skills, like chewing and moving food around the mouth, is key to speech development and establishing healthy eating habits. Pouches do not provide the varied textures or sensory experiences children need to explore different foods. Babies may miss out on learning hand-eye coordination and feeling the textures of different foods. Encouraging children to eat with a spoon or their hands and trying whole foods will help them develop the skills and preferences they'll need for a lifetime of balanced eating.

The *American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)* recommends self-feeding using fingers or utensils for infants and young children.

## Teaching healthy eating habits

When using food pouches, it is easy for children to consume them quickly without recognizing when they feel full. This can lead to overeating and make it harder for children to learn their body's hunger and fullness cues. Instead of relying on pouches, encourage parents to offer meals and snacks at set times using whole foods with different textures. Taking small bites and pausing between them can help the child check in with their feelings of fullness. This approach not only supports healthy eating habits but also complements the development of proper feeding skills.

**Share this short resource and video with families:** [Tips for Introducing Solid Foods](#)- Healthychildren.org.

## Dental concerns

Using pouches frequently can present the same risks as those using a sippy cup. The *American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD)* finds that the texture of the purees in pouches may stay on teeth longer. Prolonged contact of sugar with young teeth can increase the risk of tooth decay. Children do not always effectively clean their mouths; water between meals can help, but brushing every day is the best way to decrease dental caries.

**Learn more and share with families:** [Education and Resources for Parents](#)- AAPD.

## Family mealtimes

Part of development with meals includes the social aspect. Mealtime is an important time for families to bond and learn from one another. Parents can model healthy eating habits while sitting around the table with their children. Family meals can promote healthier eating habits for the entire family while providing the opportunity to build healthy relationships that provide children with a sense of security.

**Learn more about the benefits:** [Encouraging Family Mealtime \(PDF\)](#)- MDH WIC.

## Conversation starters for WIC staff

Here are a few topics and conversation starters related to pouches that WIC staff can use to educate and inform participants about food pouch use.

- **Encouraging Balanced Use of Pouches**
  - Pouches can be super convenient! How often are you using them? What ways have you tried combining pouches with other ways of feeding, like spoon-feeding or finger foods?
- **Exploring Feeding Skills**
  - Chewing and trying different food textures can help with your child's speech development. What foods have you offered that your child can pick up and chew?
- **Label Reading and Ingredients**

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- Some pouches are great for a quick snack, but it is good to balance them with foods your child can eat from a plate or bowl to develop a taste for a variety of flavors. Can you share how you would identify the ingredients in the pouches you use? Would you be open to my sharing where those ingredients are listed and what you could be watching for?
- **Making Mealtime Fun**
  - One way to help kids build feeding skills is to let them practice eating small, soft pieces with a spoon or their hands. Which foods have you tried giving your child to explore during meals? How do you offer these foods?
- **Introducing Family Foods**
  - As your child grows, they can start eating foods that the rest of the family is eating. Tell me about the foods you've been excited to share with your child during mealtime.
- **Using Pouches Wisely**
  - Pouches are handy when you're on the go, but when at home, serving food in a bowl with a spoon or cutting it small for finger feeding can help your child practice eating skills. What ways do you think you could try to limit using pouches by including more whole foods?

## Nutrition education cards

The WIC nutrition education cards can support families in learning and improving healthy habits. The cards can be shared in person or virtually through the [Minnesota WIC App](#) or from the [Welcome to WIC!](#) homepage under WIC Resources, Nutrition.

Below are a few cards to support families as they transition from just milk to complementary foods of all varieties.

- [Introducing Solid Foods \(PDF\)](#)
- [Finger Foods for Baby \(PDF\)](#)
- [Feeding an Older Infant \(PDF\)](#)
- [Choosing Meats & Textures \(PDF\)](#)
- [Feed with Confidence \(PDF\)](#)
- [Enjoy Family Meals \(PDF\)](#)

## Takeaways tips for parents

Providing guidance to parents on the proper use of food pouches will help to reduce the risks associated with them. Pouches can be a convenient addition when parents are on the go, and when used appropriately, can be an alternative healthy snack.

Tips for parents:

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- Transition to solid foods with appropriate textures for the child’s age and ability.
- Limit the use of pouches to occasional use.
- Choose pouches with minimal sugar and natural ingredients.
- Offer water between meals and especially after the pouch.
- Brush infant and toddlers’ teeth daily.

### **Additional resources for staff:**

[Infant Food and Feeding](#)- AAP, Updated Nov. 28, 2023

[Complementary foods in baby food pouches: position statement from the Nutrition Commission of the German Society for Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine \(DGKJ, e.V.\)](#)- National Library of Medicine, March 6, 2019.

[Is Overuse of baby Food Pouches a Problem?](#) - Nationwide Children’s, Feb. 11, 2020

[Are baby food pouches healthy? Here’s what experts say](#) – Los Angeles Times, Oct. 17, 2024.

[Is Overuse of Baby Food Pouches a Problem](#) – Nationwide Children’s Hospital, Feb. 11, 2020.

### **References – complete listing of hyperlinks:**

[Tips for Introducing Solid Foods](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Tips-for-Introducing-Solid-Foods.aspx) (https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Tips-for-Introducing-Solid-Foods.aspx)

[Education and Resources for Parents](https://www.mychildrensteeth.org/resources-for-parents/) (https://www.mychildrensteeth.org/resources-for-parents/)

[Encouraging Family Mealtime](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/topicmonth/familymeals.pdf) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/topicmonth/familymeals.pdf)

[Introducing Solid Foods](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/infintrosolids.pdf) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/infintrosolids.pdf)

[Finger Foods for Baby](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/inffingerfoods.pdf) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/inffingerfoods.pdf)

[Feeding an Older Infant](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/infolder.pdf) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/infolder.pdf)

[Choosing Meats & Textures](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/inftextures.pdf) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/inftextures.pdf)

[Feed with Confidence](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/childconfidence.pdf) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/childconfidence.pdf)

[Enjoy Family Meals](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/genfamilymeals.pdf) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/genfamilymeals.pdf)

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### Minnesota WIC App

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/infosystem/hubert/mnwicapp/index.html>)

Welcome to WIC! (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/ppthome.html>)

Infant Food and Feeding ([https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/healthy-active-living-for-families/infant-food-and-feeding/?srltid=AfmBOoqqISijwAyfb9XokzhHY237GK0YvHXZ\\_laXi8K0hjlsnGxsmfaN](https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/healthy-active-living-for-families/infant-food-and-feeding/?srltid=AfmBOoqqISijwAyfb9XokzhHY237GK0YvHXZ_laXi8K0hjlsnGxsmfaN))

Complementary foods in baby food pouches: position statement from the Nutrition Commission of the German Society for Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine (DGKJ, e.V.) (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6403273/>)

Is Overuse of baby Food Pouches a Problem? (<https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/family-resources-education/700childrens/2020/02/baby-food-pouches>)

### Are baby food pouches healthy? Here's what experts say

(<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-10-17/baby-food-pouches-healthy-nutrition-parenting#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThey%20certainly%20serve%20as%20a,vegetables%20that%20are%20not%20processed.%E2%80%9D>)

*Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL, MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, [health.wic@state.mn.us](mailto:health.wic@state.mn.us), [www.health.state.mn.us](http://www.health.state.mn.us); to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.*

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