



Texture Progression

Before introducing *new textures*, first look for signs of *readiness*:

- Baby can hold his/her head up and sit up straight while supported in a high chair
- Baby can swallow thin purees without gagging or choking, or tongue thrusting
- Baby has mastered thin purees and has been eating them for at least 3 weeks
- Baby is at least 7 months old (thin purees can be introduced at 6 months)
- Baby opens his/her mouth when spoon approaches and can clear the spoon with lips
- Baby shows interest in what parents or other children are eating

Texture Progression from Simple to Complex

Stage 1: **Liquid** – breastmilk or formula from a bottle

Stage 2: **Thin purees** – thin pureed fruits and vegetables, beginning with single ingredient then combined ingredients, baby rice, baby porridge

Stage 3: **Thick purees** – gradually thicken familiar thin purees by adding less water, or adding baby cereal to thicken it, yoghurt, pudding, hummus, pureed soups, meats pureed in a blender

Stage 4: **Fork mash** – mashed sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes, fork-mashed soft fruits and veggies like mango, cantaloupe, banana, avocado, squash, broccoli, mashed overcooked carrots, dips, make sure fork-mashed foods are of a uniform consistency with small, soft lumps.

Stage 5: **Meltable/Dissolvable solids** – baby crisps or wafers, start with thinner ones first as these break down quicker, such as Kiddilicious wafers, Pom Bears, skips, then moving onto: carrot stix, melty puffs, veggy straws etc.

Stage 6: **Soft cubes/little finger sized pieces** – ripe fruits, overcooked vegetables, avocado, peaches, sweet potatoes, soft breads, egg yolk, banana, kiwi cut into small cubes or longer little finger sized pieces for finger feeding.

Stage 7: **Soft solid single texture** – pasta without sauce, banana bread, pancakes, grated cheese, soft fish, soft cooked rice, strips of ripe fruits and overcooked veggies, strain veggies out of soups (separate from broth) serving the soft contents for finger feeding. Many babies will refuse lumps in baby foods. Mixed textures are challenging for little ones because they learn to eat purees with a sucking motion. When you add lumps to puree, they suck the lumps back, along with the puree, causing them to gag or choke. Skip puree with lumps altogether, and save mixed textures until after your baby can handle individual textures.

Stage 8: **Soft solid mixed texture** – pasta with sauce, meat or vegetable curries, macaroni cheese, cottage cheese, yoghurt with fruit, berries, soft casseroles, oatmeal, scrambled eggs, toast strips



with jam or peanut butter, chips, sweet potato chips, soft chicken strips or nuggets, halved grapes, soup with lentils, cereal bars, canned beans, flaked fish, mini sandwich with sliced ham, ice cream cone.

Stage 9: **Hard solid single texture** – always with supervision: raw fruit and vegetables, dried fruit, bite sized pieces of meat, breadsticks, crunchy cereal, veggy crisps, rice cakes, biscuits, cookies.

Stage 10: **Hard solid mixed texture** – pizza, shepherd’s pie, lasagne, burgers, sandwiches, offer whatever the family is eating cut into small pieces initially and gradually increase the size as long as it is safe for your toddler.

Tips for introducing new foods and new textures to your baby:

- Often it takes 10-20 exposures to a new food before your child will actually eat it.
- First, the child needs to accept it on their plate, and then be willing to smell and touch it.
- Ignore food refusal, praise good eating, encourage them to feed you unfamiliar foods.
- Let them get messy! Save clean up until the end of the meal.
- Tactile play with food between meals can increase comfort with new textures.
- Gagging is a normal protective response. Try not to react. You can help move the gag reflex back on the tongue by offering “hard munchables” (thick, whole raw carrot) on high chair tray for oral exploration or offering teething toys throughout the day.
- Eat WITH your child whenever possible, family meals create a positive mealtime relationship, allow you to model good mealtime behaviour, and promotes language development.
- “Division of Responsibility” in feeding encourages you to take leadership with the **what, when, and where** of feeding and let your child determine **how much** and **whether** to eat what you provide. Respect your child’s cues. No pressure or bribes, no distractions such as TV or a screen. Try not to say, “take another bite”.
- Baby should try one new food every 3-4 days to help detect potential food allergies.
- If your child continues to have (has) difficulty transitioning to new textures, discuss feeding with a Speech and Language Therapist.

Mixed Textures

Mixed textures can be difficult for toddlers who are just learning how to manage the manipulation of one texture. Casseroles, vegetable soup, etc. can overwhelm them and they may spit out pieces of things they don’t know what do with. Deconstructing mixed foods (separating out the ingredients from a stew/soup/casserole) can reduce the oral motor load and also allow the toddler to approach each item separately.



With foods of mixed texture, you can separate the ingredients in the bowl and limit the amount of liquid so for a meal such as pasta have a little pile of pasta, soft cut up tomatoes, soft meat, and cheese next to each other. This allows the child to clearly see what is in their bowl and eat one food at a time.

If serving salad, put the ingredients on the table in family-style bowls and allow the child to decide which of the foods to put on their plate.

Mashed or Sticky Foods

Many toddlers have trouble with sticky foods such as mashed potatoes or peanut butter. You might see gagging or holding the mouth open, as the food coats their tongue. Thinning these foods out can help them manage these foods and swallow them more successfully.

- Try roasted potatoes instead of mashed potatoes.
- Offer water with meals so the kids can drink regularly to help foods move around in their mouths.

Slippery Foods

A common strategy for slippery foods like banana slices, avocado slices, or other produce is to add a sprinkle of another food with a texture onto it, e.g. breadcrumbs, crushed up breadsticks or biscuits to make it easier to hold—and so that it won't move around your child's mouth quite so fast.

- Serve slippery foods on a spoon, break bananas up into segments rather than slicing into rounds.
- Spread slippery or mashed foods onto toast to add texture.

Bready Foods

Introduce firmer textures like crackers, biscotti or biscuits as a way to introduce this type of food. These might be easier to manage for a child who is looking for more [sensory] input than soft bread can provide. Serve bread or muffins or whatever other food item you are presenting as part of a meal, family-style, so your child can see the food, see you eating the food, and perhaps engage with the food on their own terms. Crumbling a muffin on your plate can be fun!

- Consider lightly toasting bread instead of serving it soft.
- Try crackers, toasted muffins, breadsticks, toasted pitta bread, etc. Just be sure to choose options that dissolve fairly quickly to reduce any choking concerns.
- Spread butter or jam onto pancakes or waffles to add moisture.
- Always offer a drink with muffins and bread to make sure your child has easy access to them if a food seems to get stuck in their mouth.

Meat



Meat is a difficult texture to chew and takes a lot of work to break it down. Children tend to prefer easier foods to chew. If your child avoids meat or chews and then spits it out, don't despair—keep presenting meat with foods they enjoy eating. Soft meats such as fish (salmon is often a favourite), casseroles and soft cooked curries are all good ones to try.

- Try meatballs, cut up or mashed.
- Blend fully cooked beef into a tomato Sauce.
- Shredded meat or chicken will always be easier for a child to eat than grilled or pan-fried, especially with steak.
- Try offering sandwich meats such as ham cut up into very soft and small pieces.

Further Tips for Helping Children with Texture Progression Difficulties

- Remember that it takes time for children to learn to eat all of the various textures available to us. Some children don't follow the expected developmental feeding milestones and this is OK, as the child may be concentrating on developing other skills first.
- Serve very small portions to reduce mealtime stress.
- Allow children to touch, taste, nibble, spit out, and explore their food as needed. All of that exposure, even if they don't actually swallow the food, is helpful progress.
- Allow children to explore food away from the table at the supermarket, farmer's market, in the garden, while helping you cook, and more where there is likely to be less pressure.
- You can add more sensory information to foods by making them distinctly hot or cold, rather than warm temperature or add some spice to give it more of a flavour.
- Always offer a drink at meals and keep it where your child can easily reach it so that they can clear their mouth if needed.
- Allow children to have their own unique likes and dislikes—it's okay if they prefer some textures over others!
- Continue to serve a variety of foods, pairing foods you know they usually like with ones that are more of a challenge so that there's always a "safe" food on their plate and exposure to additional foods you want them to eat.

