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## Hard munchables



Information for parents and carers

## **How can you help your child transition to eating solid foods?**

If your child is just learning to eat solid table foods with texture (for example foods that need chewing), every time your child sits down to have a meal or snack, put at least one puree and one hard munchable on his or her highchair tray or table.

## **What are hard munchables and how do they support my child's oral development?**

Hard munchables help with mouth development by improving tongue movements and adjusting the gag reflex. The gag reflex is a natural reaction that happens when something touches the back of the throat. They can be offered on their own or dipped in purees to encourage self-feeding and independence.

## **Why are hard munchables so important?**

The point of the Hard Munchable is for your child to practice moving a hard solid food in his or her mouth without getting a piece off. Do not let your child to bite or swallow this food.

A Hard Munchable needs to be small enough to fit in the mouth, but large enough so the child cannot get a bite off. It should be about the size and shape of a big, fat marker.



The child can then hold one end in his or her hand and put the other end in his or her mouth. His or her hand will help the tongue learn to move the food.

## **Can the hard munchables be dangerous for my child?**




Hard munchables help the child's tongue become less sensitive to certain sensations, such as touch or the presence of food, which can help your child become more comfortable with different textures and reduce the gag reflex.

This means that your child will likely accidentally gag himself or herself during food exploration.

## Do not

-  Panic! When this happens, simply look at the child and cheerfully say 'Oops! You got that back too far. Push it out with your tongue.' You can also gently put your hand over your child's hand to guide him or her in pulling the food forward and out of the mouth.
-  Pull the food all the way out of your child's mouth rapidly and scare them.

## Do

-  Move slowly and calmly.
-  Allow your child to play with these foods on their tray while you are spoon feeding them (or as they are working with other foods).
-  Put the purees and hard munchables on the tray or table or plate so that your child can explore and learn about the food before it gets into their mouth. This means that your child needs to get messy to properly explore the food. Wearing one's food is part of the process of learning to eat it, save the cleaning for after you remove them from the highchair.

## Be aware

There is a potential risk associated with a Hard Munchable.

**Do not** leave your child alone if he or she is eating a hard munchable.

**Examples of hard munchables are:**

- **Carrots.** Not baby carrots, babies may try to shave off small pieces if they have front teeth.
- **Raw celery stick.** Because of the fibres, it stays together a little bit better if a piece is starting to break off.
- **Raw broccoli stem.** This one stays pretty firm, but should not be used if your child has molars.

- **Raw bell pepper strip.** Use a large pepper so the strip is long enough, offer this one earlier when your baby has no or few teeth as it is less firm, though the skin can help keep the strip together if it is starting to break.
- **Raw green bean.** Offer this one earlier when your baby has no or few teeth as it is less firm.
- **Cucumber spear.** Offer this one earlier when your baby has no or few teeth as it is less firm, this one will likely start to get smashed pretty quickly depending on your baby's jaw strength.
- **Frozen bagel.** This one will become softer as it thaws, so remove it before it becomes too soft.
- **Frozen melon spears.** Watch for the texture as this one thaws, so remove it before it becomes too soft.
- **Pineapple core.** This one is pretty firm and sturdy, even if your child has a few molars.
- **Watermelon rind.** The white and green part of the watermelon can be used for munching.
- **Corn on the cob.** For babies with few teeth you can leave the corn on, while for babies with several teeth you can give them an empty corn cob with the corn cut or eaten off.
- **Mango pit.** This one is pretty firm and sturdy, even if your child has a few molars.
- **Hard dried mango strips.**

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Reference number: 2415  
 Publication date: 10/2024  
 Review date: 10/2027

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