

SQUEEZE AND SUCK?

How No-mess Baby Food Pouches Hinder Facial and Airway Development.



Have you noticed that food manufacturers have switched from jars of baby food to pouches that allow the pureed food to be squeezed directly into the mouth? This reinforces the baby’s already acquired ability to suck (from a breast or bottle) but fails to develop the 27 oral *chewing* muscles, especially those that help the sideways motions of the tongue.

The development of these muscles is not only critical for speech, but they single-handedly shape the inside of the mouth and throat. Bigger, stronger muscles grow a more generous “tongue box” and inner nose space, which significantly helps prevent obstructive sleep apnea and other sleep-related breathing disorders.

You might wonder if pureed foods are good for babies at all. The truth is that after a baby can sit and hold their head independently, they are ready to be introduced to solid foods. Start with small quantities of finger food, one at a time, beginning with softer foods like bananas and avocado. They will use their fingers to pinch and then their chewing muscles to mash the foods between their gums. This is called baby-led weaning (BLW).

Beyond oral muscle health, BLW helps with speech development and hand strength/dexterity. The bonus is it’s easy for YOU because within months your baby will be able to eat the very same foods you are. Is it messy? Yes! That’s part of the magic of exploration. Repetitive exposure to a variety of textures, smells and tastes helps build better relationships with foods. The brain needs to register these sensations, repeatedly, for kids to develop a broad spectrum of likes and preferences. The diversity of our food choices ultimately dictates a healthier gut “microbiome” that, in

turn, reduces allergies, bolsters our natural immunity, reduces autoimmune disorders and results in better GI function.

In response to pouches, nutritionists are warning parents that pouches allow babies to suck their nutrition right past their lips and down the hatch. This means the food doesn’t have the chance to reach their smelling receptors or their taste buds before it’s swallowed.

Next, there’s the potential contribution to overweightness. Like adults sucking down a great big smoothie on their way out the door (rather than taking the time to chew and swallow the bulky ingredients), babies with pouches can easily end up with a calorie glut. Condensing foods into purees and consuming them quickly simply doesn’t allow enough feedback time for the stomach to switch off the appetite signal. Lastly, by using a blender, we break down the quality of *insoluble fiber*, which is so critical for gastrointestinal health.

So, the next time you’re in the grocery store, pass by the baby food pouches aisle on your way to shop for whole foods.



Dr. Susan Maples is a dentist in Holt. She is also a speaker, health educator, and author of “BlabberMouth! 77 Secrets Only Your Mouth Can Tell You to Live a Healthier, Happier, Sexier Life” and “Brave Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy Kids (Against All Odds) in Today’s World.” Reach her at Susan@DrSusanMaples.com



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