Nicola Galloway

feeding little tummies

a guide for New Zealand parents & caregivers

healthy recipes from first foods to toddler meals

craig potton publishing

For my Nana, Ngaire Galloway, who inspired my passion for cooking from a young age with our Thursday afternoon cooking sessions.

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with thanks. . .

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Allergies & food intolerances

Food allergies and intolerances have become more common in recent years. An allergic reaction to food is the result of an over-reaction of the immune system to a harmless food particle. This triggers an immune response, which can result in anything from a mild rash, wheezing and diarrhoea to more serious conditions such as eczema or asthma. An even more serious reaction can also occur, with anaphylactic shock, potentially leading to death. With such allergies even minute quantities of the food can cause a reaction, e.g. peanut allergy. It is therefore always important to consult your health practitioner if you suspect your child has an allergy. An allergic reaction usually happens within one to four hours of the offending food being eaten.

Foods that commonly produce an allergic reaction are:

- Cow's milk and dairy products.
- Eggs.
- Wheat and gluten.
- Seafood, particularly shellfish.
- Peanuts and tree nuts (almonds, cashews, walnuts, Brazil nuts, macadamias, etc.), sesame seeds.
- Soy products.
- Food additives such as colourings, nitrates and preservatives.

Many children will outgrow allergies to common foods such as milk, eggs and wheat. Breastfeeding for at least the first 6 months can also help as it has been found to reduce allergies, especially when there is a family history. If there is such a family history, it is important when introducing new foods to do so gradually. Try one new food at a time and observe your child over three to four days to see if she develops an allergic reaction to it. This way you can isolate a particular food if it does cause a reaction. In the case of a severe anaphylactic allergy within your immediate family, it is best to discuss this with your health professional, as management will depend on the allergenic food and other factors.

Food intolerances differ from allergies in that they do not involve the immune system. Instead, for some reason, the body is incapable of digesting a certain food. It can result when the body does not have the necessary enzymes to digest a food — such as lactose in cow's milk — or the enzymes needed to digest this particular food are exhausted from over-consumption of that food, as can be the case with wheat (which can easily be consumed at every meal, every day). With food intolerance it can be hard to pinpoint the specific food/s involved because, unlike allergies, the reaction is often delayed. The symptoms of food intolerance are related to digestion, and include bloating, gas, stomach cramps, nausea, diarrhoea, a lack of energy or tiredness, skin rashes, and nutrient malabsorption leading to poor immunity. Food intolerances can often be avoided by eating a varied diet, for example, instead of eating wheat with every meal — wheat cereal for breakfast, sandwiches for lunch, crackers as a snack and pasta for dinner — replace with foods that contain a variety of different grains.

Wheat intolerance

Wheat is found in bread, pasta, cereals, cookies, cakes, pastries, crackers, couscous, bulghur wheat and semolina, so can easily be eaten in quantities that lead to an intolerance. The wheat content of a diet can be reduced by using alternative flours, although be aware that the texture and lightness of the end result may differ:

- Rye is heavy and dense, with a strong flavour, and can be used for baking bread.
- Oat flour is dense and moist, and can be added to cakes and muffins for extra texture.
- Barley flour can be substituted for wheat flour, but as it is heavier it is best used in fruit cakes and slices.
- Spelt and kamut (ancient grains related to wheat, see page 84) can be used in the same way as wheat flour to make bread, cakes, cookies and pastries. They have a similar taste and texture to wheat flour and are available from organic stores and some supermarkets.

Gluten intolerance

Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye, barley and oats that creates elasticity and lightness in bread, and holds together cakes and biscuits. For some people gluten can aggravate the digestive condition known as coeliac disease, in which the microvilli of the small intestine have been damaged. Microvilli are small finger-like tendrils that absorb nutrients from food. When they are damaged, nutrient deficiencies can occur, resulting in poor immunity and allergic symptoms. Other symptoms of coeliac disease include weight loss, digestive problems, stomach cramps and foul-smelling stools.

Gluten may not be the cause of coeliac disease but it does tend to aggravate it, so avoiding gluten is helpful for people with the condition. If there is a family history of coeliac disease, it is recommended to discuss this with your health professional to ascertain if and when to introduce gluten grains into the diet.

There are now several gluten-free flours available as alternatives:

- Rice flour can be used for sweet cookies and pie crusts. It tends to make a drier product, so use ⅞ cup to every 1 cup of wheat flour in a recipe.
- Buckwheat flour has a strong flavour. It is good for pancakes and crêpes.
- Potato flour contributes moisture, so mix it with dry flours such as rice flour or cornmeal.
- Chickpea flour adds protein and texture, and is quite crumbly. Use small amounts in savoury recipes and for thickening sauces.
- Cornmeal and polenta absorb a lot of water, so will require extra liquid. They are good for making corn bread and pizza bases.
- Ground nuts such as almonds and hazelnuts, as well as coconut add moisture and increase the protein content but can be quite expensive.

Wholegrains that are gluten-free include the following:

- Rice: brown, white, jasmine, basmati, Arborio (risotto rice).
- Quinoa, millet, buckwheat: wash and cook as for rice (see page 97).
- Polenta: combine 1 part grain with 4 parts water (see Polenta Shapes page 53).

GLUTEN-FREE **BAKING**

Gluten-free flour mix:

Combine 200 g potato flour, 200 g cornflour (corn starch) or arrowroot/tapioca flour, 100 g rice flour and 100 g chickpea flour, sifting together several times to combine thoroughly. Store in an airtight container and use within a month.

Gluten-free baking powder:

Combine 1 part baking soda, 1 part cream of tartar, and 1 part cornflour or arrowroot/tapioca flour.

Milk-protein allergy & lactose intolerance

Cow's milk can cause two different problems: an allergic reaction to the protein it contains, and a lactose (milk sugar) intolerance. Milk-protein allergies are relatively rare and will often be outgrown. As with all allergies, the symptoms will be quick to appear and will disappear within several days of dairy being removed from the diet.

Lactose intolerance, on the other hand, is quite common (as many as one in 10 people are sufferers). This is often hereditary, especially among people of Polynesian, African or Asian descent, whose traditional diet did not contain dairy products. To digest milk we require the enzyme lactase, which the body stops producing in early childhood if the diet does not typically include milk after weaning. Such individuals simply do not have the ability to digest lactose.

If you suspect your child has an allergy or intolerance to dairy products, try removing them from the diet for four to five days

to see if this makes any difference. The fermentation process of dairy products, such as yoghurt, cheese and buttermilk breaks down the lactose, meaning these products are often easier for lactose-intolerant people to digest. For a proper diagnosis, or if you suspect your bottle-fed infant has a milk intolerance or dairy allergy, talk to your health professional.

If you do have to remove dairy products from your child's diet owing to an allergy or intolerance, you may be concerned about the amount of calcium he or she is getting. While dairy products are a good source of calcium, they are not the only source and many vegetable foods contain calcium in agreeable quantities. Non-dairy foods that contain calcium include leafy green vegetables, wholegrains, quinoa and soy products. One of the best calcium sources is nuts and seeds, in particular sesame seeds — use tahini (sesame paste) and ground nuts in your children's food regularly to benefit from the calcium and other nutrients they contain (be aware that to avoid choking it is advised to wait until three years to introduce whole nuts and seeds).

There are several alternatives to cow's milk:

- Goat's or sheep's milk.
- Soy milk.
- Rice milk.

NUT **MILK**

To make nut milk, finely grind 1 cup nuts (almonds, cashews, Brazil nuts or walnuts) in a food processor. Add 2 cups water and blend for a few minutes until milky. Strain through a cheesecloth-lined sieve or colander.

Nut milk can be enjoyed as a calcium-rich drink, poured over cereal or added to smoothies. The nut pulp can be retained for adding to cakes or biscuits, or mixed with banana for a baby mash or toast spread. Use nut milk within 48 hours.

Variation: to make oat milk use 1 cup rolled oats in place of nuts.

- Coconut milk and coconut cream.
- Nut milks (see box).
- Oat milk.
- Water.

Alternatives to cow's-milk cheese and butter include:

- Goat's-milk or sheep's-milk feta or other cheeses (protein and calcium).
- Tofu and legumes or dried beans (protein and calcium).
- Whole or ground nuts and seeds (protein, calcium and magnesium).
- As a spread for bread, replace butter with peanut or nut butter, avocado, tahini or drizzle with extra-virgin olive oil.
- Substitute butter in baking with coconut oil (see page 113) or a butter alternative such as rice bran oil spread.

Egg allergy

Allergies to eggs are also relatively common. Egg alternatives for use in baking include (per egg replace with):

- ⅓ cup yoghurt.
- ⅓ cup apple purée or mashed banana.
- **Flaxseed egg substitute**: 1 Tbsp ground flaxseeds (linseed), soaked in ¼ cup warm water for 10 minutes. It becomes mucilaginous like egg white so helps to bind baking (and flaxseeds also contain omega 3).

Immune-boosting foods

Building and supporting the immune system is the key to good health, as it is the body's protective army. If the immune system is weak, the body is unable to deal with infections effectively and will suffer from frequent or recurring illnesses. Eating nutrient-rich foods from an early age helps to develop a healthy immune system that will last a lifetime. Different types of foods have different benefits, but the following all have immune-boosting properties.

- **Omega 3 essential fatty acids** are metabolised by the body into prostaglandins, which regulate immune response. The body cannot make omega 3 itself, so it needs to be sourced from the food we eat. Good sources include oily fish such as salmon, tuna and sardines, walnuts, flaxseeds, wholegrains and leafy green vegetables.
- **Fresh seasonal fruits** are bursting with vitamin C and beta-carotene, which is converted to vitamin A as required by the body. These antioxidants neutralise the free radicals that are released when the immune system fights infection.
- **Leafy green vegetables** contain antioxidants, immune-boosting flavonoids and chlorophyll. Antioxidants assist in the production of key immune players such as white blood cells and antibodies.
- **Wholegrains, legumes, nuts and seeds** contain the antioxidant mineral selenium and B complex vitamins, which are essential for immune response and antibody production.
- **Seafood, free-range eggs, dairy products, lean meat and chicken** are high in protein, which is needed for building the immune system. They also contain iron and zinc, both of which are important for immune function.
- **Onions and garlic** have antiviral and antibiotic properties to boost the immune system. Garlic in particular contains allicin, a naturally occurring substance which protects against the viruses and bacteria that cause many common childhood illnesses. Add garlic to soups and stews, and serve garlic bread with dinner.
- **Ginger** is the antiviral champion for colds, reducing pain and fever. It is also great at calming a nauseous stomach and is a mild sedative. Keep a root of fresh ginger in the freezer and finely grate it into stir-frys, soups and stews.
- **Manuka honey** has antibacterial and antiviral properties thanks to the powerful enzymes it contains. Heating the honey or cooking with it will, however, destroy these immune-boosting properties. Be aware also that children should not eat raw honey until they are 12 months old as it can contain botulism-causing bacteria.

FOOD **ADDITIVES**

Preservatives, nitrates, artificial sweeteners and colours are all added to food to increase shelf life, enhance flavour and keep it looking fresh, even after it has been sitting on a shelf for months. These additives have no nutritional value, and although many are considered safe for adults it is unknown how they may affect small children, who have a much lower body weight. Early childhood is a time of prolific cell replication and development, so it is essential that the growing body and brain are supported with the right nutrients.

Food additives can also cause reactions in sensitive people, including rashes, allergies, stomach upsets, breathing difficulties and nausea. They can confuse the body's biochemical balance especially when combined with sugar and may contribute to behavioural problems in children. When buying pre-packaged food, and to avoid additives choose food that has a list of ingredients you recognise and a short shelf life, indicating that it is preservative-free.

If you wish to delve deeper into this subject, there is plenty of information available to help you determine which food additives are best to avoid and others that are generally regarded as safe. A useful book is *The Chemical Maze* by Bill Statham. This pocket-sized book is in alphabetical and numerical order and includes helpful symbols so you can quickly look up food additives while shopping. In addition, the New Zealand Safe Food Campaign has a comprehensive web-site with articles on food additives, see www.safefood.org.nz

Snacks & lunches

Lunch is essential for providing toddlers with enough energy to see them through the afternoon. It is especially important for children who attend childcare or preschool, as they may not have the chance to top up on snacks in the same way as they can at home. For this reason, make sure you provide a packed lunch or snack box full of foods that will give them energy and feed their brains.

Young children at home may do better on five or six small meals and snacks a day rather than three large meals, as they have small stomachs but a fast metabolism and so burn food rapidly. Commercial snack foods are often high in sugar and salt and lack nutrients, so should be avoided in favour of more healthy options.

This section has simple snack ideas and recipes for quick lunches at home, as well as lunch and snack box suggestions.

SNACKS

If young children go without food for too long, their blood sugar level drops along with their energy, resulting in grizzly behaviour. A nutritious snack to keep them going can work wonders, especially around mid-afternoon. If you are going out with young children, it therefore pays to take a small snack box of finger foods with you for them to nibble on. This can simply contain peeled pieces of apple, cheese wedges and a sandwich square. Include a water bottle to prevent dehydration, which can also contribute to irritability. Choose water rather than fruit juice, as it is better for children to eat fruits whole and benefit from the fibre they contain.

IT'S ALL ABOUT **BALANCE**

The important thing to keep in mind is to include some protein with every meal and snack. It is easy to load up on carbohydrates — bread, crackers, fruit — but often not as easy to factor in protein. The key to sustained energy for toddlers (and adults) is a balance of carbohydrate and protein in every meal and snack. That doesn't mean you have to weigh every item in a meal to get the right proportions as even just a small quantity of protein will make a difference. As a general rule of thumb for a main meal — breakfast, lunch or dinner — aim for your child's palm-sized piece of protein. For a snack this would be less depending on the size of the snack. Easy protein to have on hand includes:

- Cheese
- Peanut butter
- Hummus
- Yoghurt
- Left-over cooked meat
- Occasional small amounts of processed meat i.e. salami, ham, sausage

SNACK **IDEAS**

As always, food presentation is important to young children. Cut food into fun shapes and invest in a range of colourful transport containers in which to put cut fruit or yoghurt when out and about. Some ideas for snacks and snack boxes include:

- easy-peel mandarins, bananas, grapes.
- Vegetable sticks: carrot, cucumber (skin removed for babies), celery. Include a selection of dips, such as mayonnaise, yoghurt or pasta sauce.
- Dried fruit: raisins, apricots, figs, apple, banana chips. The sticky pieces of dried fruit can easily get stuck in teeth, so make sure they are eaten with something that requires chewing to clean the teeth afterwards.
- A small container of natural yoghurt sweetened with fruit purée or fruit conserve (see page 73).
- Rice cakes or crackers (unflavoured).
- A small bag of popcorn (see page 105).
- A container of cooked pasta shapes with Red Tomato Sauce (see page 131) or olive oil and lemon juice.
- Small squares of Chewy Apricot Muesli Bars (see page 79) or Pinwheel Scones (see page 96).
- Protein-rich Mini Pancakes (see page 72) – make a large batch and keep them in the fridge to have on hand for lunch or afternoon snacks.
- Pre-cut shapes or wedges of cheese. Cut a selection of shapes from a large block of cheese and keep them in a sealed container in the fridge.
- Mini sandwiches cut into shapes (trees, fish, car, face, letters) using cookie cutters or a small knife.
- Roll-up sandwiches (see page 104): use tortilla wraps, spread with fillings and roll up tightly. Cut into slices.
- For babies, include teething rusks, pieces of fruit (wrapped in muslin if necessary), vegetable sticks and plain rice cakes. Note: do not give young children small foods such as nuts, raisins and popcorn when they are in the car in case they choke.

Chewy apricot muesli bars

These muesli bars taste so good you wouldn't even know they don't contain sugar. They are full of nutrients, including iron (in the dried apricots), protein and essential fatty acids (in the eggs), and B vitamins, calcium, magnesium and silica (in the oats).

100 g dried apricots, roughly chopped
100 g dates or other dried fruit (raisins, figs, sultanas), roughly chopped
juice of 1 orange or ½ cup fruit juice
2 eggs, beaten
75 g butter, melted
2 cups small rolled oats
1 cup desiccated coconut or equivalent rolled oats
⅓ cup plain flour
½ tsp ground cinnamon
½ tsp baking powder

Preheat the oven to 180°C. Line a 20 x 30 cm tin with baking paper.

Chop the dried fruit in a food processor with the orange juice until minced, or use a sharp knife to chop them thoroughly and then mix with the juice. If using a food processor and the dried fruit is too tough to mince leave to soak in the juice for 30 minutes to soften.

Add eggs and melted butter and pulse briefly. Mix together the oats, coconut, flour, cinnamon and baking powder in a large bowl. Make a well in the middle, pour in the minced fruit mixture and mix thoroughly.

Firmly press the mixture into the lined tin. Bake for 15–20 minutes until golden on top and firm to the touch. Remove from the tin and cool on a rack. Once warm cut into approx. 18–24 small bars or squares and store in an airtight container in the fridge. Use within 4–7 days or freeze and remove individual bars as needed to add to snack/lunch boxes.

preparation time 20 minutes
cooking time 20 minutes
WF use spelt or kamut flour
GF if oats are not tolerated replace them with rice or quinoa flakes
DF use butter substitute
EF replace eggs with flaxseed egg substitute (page 18)
suitable from 8 months
makes **18–24 bars**

preparation time 20 minutes plus 30 minutes resting time

cooking time 15–20 minutes

WF use spelt or kamut flour

DF use olive oil

EF

suitable from 8 months (omit salt)

makes about **40–80 crackers**

Flax crackers

This recipe makes a large batch of crackers, perfect for quick snacks. They can be cut into squares or circles, or use cookie cutters to make shapes. Spread crackers with something protein-rich such as Hummus (see page 81) or cottage cheese or serve with dips and vegetables sticks.

1 cup white flour
1 cup wholemeal or rye flour
½ tsp salt
⅓ cup ground flaxseeds
1 tsp kelp powder (optional)
1 tsp baking powder
50 ml olive oil or 50 g melted butter
approx. 1 cup water

Preheat the oven to 180°C. Line two oven trays with baking paper.

Mix the dry ingredients in a large bowl. Drizzle over the oil or melted butter and rub with fingers to combine well. Pour over the water and mix to a firm dough. Add extra water if required. Form into a ball in the bowl and leave to sit for at least 30 minutes covered with a tea towel. This allows the grains to absorb moisture, improving their digestibility.

Divide into two balls and roll one at a time on a well-floured bench using a floured rolling pin to avoid sticking. Roll the dough out evenly into a thin sheet about 1 mm thick. Using a blunt knife or cookie cutters, cut into squares or shapes. Re-roll extra dough until all used. Carefully transfer the shapes using a fish slice or spatula onto the lined baking trays. Prick each cracker several times with a fork to avoid bubbles and bake for 15–20 minutes until golden. Cool on a wire rack and store in an airtight container in the pantry for several weeks.

variation Add 2 Tbsp finely grated parmesan to the dough and/or 2 Tbsp poppy seeds.

STORE-BOUGHT **CRACKERS**

Most commercial crackers are high in salt and get their 'crunch' factor from hydrogenated fats These altered fats, though they have a long shelf life, also contain unhealthy trans-fatty acids. Trans-fats are best avoided, and are found mainly in processed meats, deep-fried foods, commercial crackers (even so called 'healthy' ones), cookies, pastries and chips, and some toast spreads such as chocolate-flavoured spreads and peanut butters.

Hummus

Making homemade hummus is easy, and a great way to get young children to eat nutrient-dense legumes. Beans and legumes (dried beans, peas and lentils) are high in iron, calcium, zinc, potassium and B vitamins, and also contain soluble fibre, which is gentle on a young digestive system.

400 g can chickpeas
juice of 1 lemon
2 Tbsp olive oil
1 tsp ground cumin
1–2 cloves garlic, chopped
salt and cayenne pepper to taste

Drain and rinse the chickpeas thoroughly under cold water to wash away excess salt. Place the chickpeas in a food processor with the lemon juice, olive oil, cumin, garlic, salt and cayenne pepper. Process until smooth. Adjust the seasoning, adding more lemon juice if needed.

Store in an airtight container in the fridge and use within 3–4 days.

DIPS FOR CRACKERS & **VEGETABLE STICKS**

Peanut butter dip: mix 4 Tbsp peanut butter, tahini or other nut butter with 4 Tbsp water, a pinch of ground cumin, 1 Tbsp soy sauce and 2 Tbsp lemon juice.

Sour cream and pesto: mix 200 g sour cream with 1 heaped Tbsp pesto.

Avocado and cottage cheese: mash ½ avocado with 100 g cottage cheese.

Zesty yoghurt dip: combine 1 cup yoghurt with 1 tsp whole-grain mustard and 1 tsp lemon zest. Add chopped garlic to taste, if desired.

Honey mustard: in a small jar, shake together the juice of ½ lemon, 1 Tbsp wholegrain mustard, 1 Tbsp honey, 1 chopped garlic clove (optional), ½ cup olive oil, salt and pepper. This can also be used as a salad dressing and keeps in the fridge for two weeks.

Banana & walnut muffins

Muffins are so easy to make — simply mix the wet and dry ingredients in separate bowls then barely fold them together (overmixing results in tough muffins). These are low in sugar (it can even be omitted) as the ripe bananas contribute plenty of natural sweetness. The walnuts provide protein and omega 3, and a little texture to encourage chewing.

2 cups white flour (or 1 cup white and 1 cup wholemeal)
1 tsp baking powder
½ tsp baking soda
½ tsp cinnamon
⅓ cup brown sugar (optional)
½ cup chopped or ground walnuts (optional)
2 ripe bananas, about 1 cup mashed
1 free-range egg, beaten
1 cup buttermilk or ½ cup milk mixed with ½ cup yoghurt
50 g melted butter or 50 ml neutral oil

Preheat the oven to 190°C. Grease or line with paper cases a 12 hole muffin tray or 24 hole mini-muffin tray.

Mix together the flour, baking powder, baking soda and cinnamon. Add the sugar and walnuts. Combine, making a deep well in the mix.

In a separate bowl mash the bananas. Add the egg, buttermilk and melted butter or oil and beat together. Pour the wet mixture into the well of the dry ingredients and use a large metal spoon or spatula to fold together until just incorporated – a little unmixed flour in the batter is fine.

Spoon the mixture evenly into the muffin holes, about two thirds full. Bake for 15–18 minutes until golden brown and firm to touch. Cool for 5 minutes in the tin then remove muffins to a wire rack. Muffins are always best eaten fresh but can be stored for several days in an airtight container. They can also be frozen and removed as needed for snacks and lunch boxes.

variations Use this recipe as a base and substitute the banana and walnuts with:

Chocolate & zucchini: 1 cup finely grated zucchini (drained) and 50 g grated dark chocolate or chips (include sugar).

Pumpkin & feta: 1 cup mashed cooked pumpkin and 50 g crumbled feta or grated cheese (omit the sugar), sprinkle with pumpkin seeds.

Corn & cheese: 1 cup creamed corn, and 50 g grated cheese, and sprinkle with sunflower seeds (omit sugar).

preparation time 20 minutes
cooking time 15–18 minutes
GF use gluten-free flour mix (page 17)
WF use spelt or kamut flours
DF use oil
suitable from 7 months (omit sugar)
makes **12 medium-sized or 24 mini muffins**

Energy balls

These energy-packed treats are easy to make, especially with the help of little hands to roll them, and unlike most commercial snack foods they are sugar free. Dried apricots are particularly high in essential iron, and the vitamin C in the orange juice helps the body absorb the iron. Where possible choose un-sulphured apricots, as some people can have an adverse reaction to sulphur dioxide, which is used to preserve the colour of the fruit.

1 cup nuts and/or sunflower seeds (e.g. almonds, walnuts, Brazil nuts)
⅔ cup small rolled oats
100 g dried apricots, well chopped (if tough, soak first in boiling water for 10 minutes)
juice of 1 orange (around ½ cup)
1 Tbsp ground flaxseeds (optional for extra fibre boost)
½ cup desiccated coconut, plus extra for rolling
squeeze of lemon juice to taste

In a food processor, process the nuts and/or sunflower seeds until ground. Add the oats, chopped apricots, orange juice and coconut, and process until the mixture comes together (add extra oats or orange juice if needed to hold together).

Shape into small walnut-sized balls, roll in coconut and chill to set. Store in a sealed container in the fridge for up to a week.

variations

Tropical energy balls: use cashews and macadamia nuts and replace the apricots with chopped tropical fruits such as papaya and mango.

Sesame halva balls: use sunflower seeds and replace the apricots with dates and the coconut with sesame seeds.

Choc hazel fig balls: use hazelnuts, 1 Tbsp carob or cocoa powder, and figs in place of apricots.

Nutrient-booster balls: (especially useful for vegetarian children), add 1 Tbsp protein-rich bee pollen or 1 tsp spirulina.

preparation time 15–20 minutes
GF; WF; DF; EF
suitable from 9 months
makes **12–16**

SUGAR Sugar is an empty-nutrient food, which means that while it provides energy and flavour, it contains inadequate nutrients to support growing bodies. The sweetness of white sugar can also overpower a food, so by reducing its quantity in recipes you can help your children learn to appreciate the subtle flavours of the other ingredients.

Halve the sugar quantity in recipes You can often halve sugar quantities in cakes and muffins recipes with little noticeable difference to taste or texture, especially for young tastebuds. If a recipe calls for 1 cup of sugar reduce to ½ cup sugar and add ½ cup of a liquid such as milk, yoghurt, mashed banana, grated apple or fruit purée.

preparation time 15 minutes
cooking time 12–15 minutes
EF
WF use spelt or kamut flour
DF use oil
suitable from 12 months
makes **12–16 cookies**

Oat choc cookies

These quick and delicious egg-free cookies can be whipped up in no time. They are so easy you can teach older children to make them by themselves, and they can be adapted so that you can have a different cookie flavour every week. Honey is sweeter than sugar therefore less is required.

1 cup flour
1 cup small rolled oats
1 tsp baking powder
½ tsp ground cinnamon
⅓ cup chocolate chips (optional)
100 ml neutral oil or 100 g melted butter
3 Tbsp honey, maple syrup or golden syrup
½ tsp vanilla essence

Preheat the oven to 180°C and line an oven tray with baking paper.

Combine the flour, oats, baking powder, cinnamon and chocolate chips in a large bowl. Combine the oil or melted butter with the honey and vanilla, mixing well to soften the honey. Pour over the dry mixture and combine (the mixture will be quite sticky). Using 2 tablespoons, scoop small mounds of the mixture onto the prepared tray. Leave space between each cookie, as they will spread a little during cooking.

Bake for 12–15 minutes until golden brown. Use a metal spatula or fish slice to carefully move the cookies onto a wire rack. They are quite crumbly until they cool and set. Store in an airtight container for up to a week, or double the recipe and freeze extra cooked cookies for lunch or snack boxes.

variation Add ½ cup chopped nuts (e.g. walnuts, almonds, Brazil nuts)

tip Baking paper can be used several times when making cookies, just shake off any crumbs and fold away until next time.

SPELT & KAMUT Spelt and kamut are ancient grains from the same botanical family as wheat. They can often be tolerated by people with a wheat allergy or intolerance, due to their lower gluten content. They contain more protein and essential fats than wheat, giving a nuttier flavour and moister texture. Spelt and kamut are available from health food stores and some supermarkets and can be used in the same way as wheat with similar results.

Almond & jam cookies

These are fun to make, and as 100 per cent fruit conserve (see page 73) is used, these aren't as bad as they sound. Sweetened only with fruit and fruit juice concentrate they are a much better option for healthy teeth.

100 g soft butter
¼ cup sugar
1 egg at room temperature
1 tsp lemon zest
½ tsp vanilla essence
1 cup flour
½ tsp baking powder
pinch of salt
½ cup ground almonds or the equivalent quantity of flour
100 per cent fruit conserve

Preheat the oven to 180°C. Line an oven tray with baking paper.

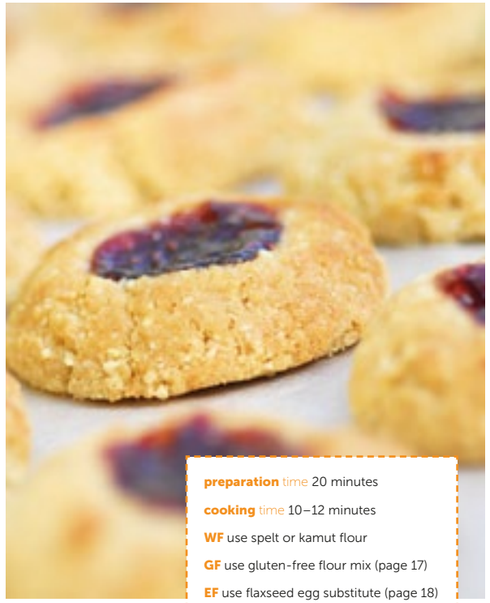
Cream the butter and sugar with an electric mixer or food processor until fluffy and light. Add the egg, zest and vanilla, and mix thoroughly. Sift in the flour, baking powder and salt, then add the ground almonds and mix well to form a dough.

Roll the dough into small walnut-sized balls. Arrange on the tray with a space between each. With your thumb or the end of a wooden spoon, make a 1 cm diameter indent in the middle of each ball. Use a small teaspoon to fill the holes with fruit spread — not too much or it will spill over during cooking.

Bake for 10–12 minutes until lightly golden. Cool on a wire rack and store in a sealed container. The cookies will keep fresh for 4–5 days or you can freeze them and remove as needed for lunch or snack boxes.

variation Use fine desiccated coconut or ground hazelnuts in place of the ground almonds.

tip When soft butter is called for in a recipe but you have only cold, hard butter on hand, chop the required amount into small cubes and then pulse it in a food processor until soft, wiping down the sides a few times with a spatula.



preparation time 20 minutes
cooking time 10–12 minutes
WF use spelt or kamut flour
GF use gluten-free flour mix (page 17)
EF use flaxseed egg substitute (page 18)
suitable from 12 months
makes **approx. 18**

GROUND **ALMONDS** Adding ground nuts such as almonds to cookies and cakes adds both extra nutrition and texture. Almonds contain vitamin E, calcium, magnesium, protein and cholesterol-lowering mono-unsaturated oils. Ground almonds can be bought from most supermarkets and bulk food stores — buy small amounts at a time and store in the freezer so they don't go rancid. You can make your own by grinding whole almonds in a food processor until they reach the consistency of a fine meal (a bit like gritty sand).

Other nuts can be ground including walnuts, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamias, etc.