

Our Baby's First Food Wasn't What We Expected

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Of all the decisions we've had to make in the first several months of our son's life — to circumcise or not to circumcise, cloth or disposable diapers, which crowbar to use to pry him out of his grandmother's arms — figuring out what to feed him has been among the hardest. The dilemma began at his 6-month check-up, when his pediatrician advised transitioning baby to solids.

Seconds after we left her office, my husband started in with his views. "Indian. It should definitely be Indian. Maybe a masala dosa," a fried lentil crepe stuffed with spicy mashed potatoes. "Or idli. Those are made with rice, right? Perfect for gumming." From there, Garrett began listing out all of the possible Indian delicacies our son could eat: samosas, vegetable stews, syrupy swirls of dough known as jalebis. Dipping various foods into sambar, a zesty soup, or chutney would enable baby to simultaneously work on his fine motor skills *and* enjoy the wondrous array of deliciousness that is Indian cooking, Garrett reasoned.

Neither of us are Indian, but we're utterly devoted to Indian food. We're regulars at not one but six Indian restaurants near our apartment in Manhattan. And when traveling around the subcontinent a few years ago, a full third of the photos we took were of things we ate. We joked that if our son didn't like Indian food, we'd have to worry that he'd been switched at the hospital.

But I wasn't sure I wanted his first food to be fried. Or spicy. Or mashed. Fed on breast milk from birth, he was used to sweet, rich tastes. So perhaps, I argued, his first food should be an overly ripe fruit like banana. Nature's candy!

I envisioned baby lapping up wholesome and unprocessed tastes. One of my goals as a mom is to set him up for a lifetime of healthy habits. Starting on something fresh, my logic went, would encourage him to associate nutritious foods with sating his hunger.

Living in New York City, my husband and I had heard the urban legends, tall-ish tales of mysterious toddlers who loved wasabi on their sushi, who gobbled octopus al dente or enjoyed foie gras. In some ways, what, when, and how much your child eats is yet another class marker, as telling as whether darling son or daughter rides around in a stroller that costs \$50 or \$5,000.

My husband and I don't care about such matters. Really. When I was pregnant, a well-meaning friend asked me to describe my baby's style, so that she could better determine which hand-me-downs to pass along. "Free," I said. "His style is free."

It's just that eating is one of my great pleasures, as my thighs can attest. Garrett and I want our son to be curious and adventurous, including in what he eats. His first food had become a way we could inculcate such characteristics in him almost from the get-go.

Eventually we agreed that baby's first solid would be an apple at home and Indian at a restaurant, a compromise we felt honored our love of eating out while recognizing that he was, after all, only 6 months old. We looked forward to taking him for Ethiopian and tacos, preparing corn on the cob, and handing him strawberries grown upstate, all while watching him develop his own predilections and preferences.

Pleased with ourselves, Garrett and I went out for breakfast at a neighborhood diner, with board games on the tables and clever slogans on the walls. We put baby in a high chair, so that he could get used to being off of our laps and participating in mealtimes in a more active way. Almost immediately, he started wailing and flailing. A rattle landed on the floor. A stuffed animal narrowly missed a pile of pancakes at the next table. Getting desperate, we handed baby a Trivial Pursuit card to fiddle with.

He quieted immediately. Garrett and I resumed asking each other trivia questions about science and nature, arts and entertainment, and the always-popular wild card category from the pile that remained on the table. When the food came, we turned to baby.

The card was mostly gone, pulped into oblivion. His first food had come not from an orchard or a kitchen, but from Hasbro.

At least he got some fiber.