

Squeezy Foods – Pros and Cons

Colourful squeezy pouches with built-in feeding tips are seen as a lifesaver for busy families and carers but are they a healthy option?

Pros

- No refrigeration needed
- No heating required
- No need for eating utensils
- No food preparation required
- Low mess

Cons

- May have misleading nutrition claims
- Can contain large amounts of sugar
- May delay development of oral motor skills
- Children miss out on food experimentation increasing the risk of fussy eating
- May decrease opportunities for shared mealtimes or eating family foods

Nutrition Claims – Facts & Myths

Squeezy foods marketing themselves as a good source of vegetables are one of the biggest claims to be aware of. Many products often contain large amounts of fruit and only small proportions of vegetables.

Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend that children aged between 7 months to 24 months should eat between ½ to 1 serve fruit per day. Serves of fruit can quickly add up when eating 'squeezy foods' if mostly fruit-based types are consumed. Fruit is a healthy choice but needs to be eaten in recommended amounts to ensure food group requirements are met.

The best way to identify if a product is a healthy choice is to look at the ingredients list and the nutrition information panel found on the back of the product.

Oral Health

Dentists recommend that infants should avoid squeezy foods and sippy cups and go straight from a bottle to a cup between 12 and 15 months to help decrease the risk of tooth decay.

Facial Muscle Development

Introduction of solids is important nutritionally and vital for a child to develop and strengthen oral motor skills such as sucking, biting, chewing and licking. Eating different textures requires different tongue and other mouth muscle movements which are critical for speech development. Children use these muscles less when consuming squeezy foods which can lead to a delayed speech development.

Food experimentation

Experimentation with different food tastes and textures is important for a child's development.

Using food in squeeze pouches regularly, takes away from children the chance to touch and feel different food textures, and limits the development of their ability to use their fingers for skills such as using a spoon, or picking up food and placing it in their mouths. These experiences, while a bit messy, help children adjust to, and be more willing to accept different food textures and tastes – making them less likely to be a 'fussy eater'.

Children need to learn to feed themselves not only by putting foods in their mouths but also feeling the textures between their hands

The early childhood years are a critical time for developing food preferences. The greater food variety children are exposed to, the more likely they will enjoy a diversity of foods as adults¹.

Mealtimes

Structured family mealtimes and children eating the same food as the rest of the family are important concepts that help lay the foundation of good nutrition. Children who sit down for mealtimes with the family more likely to:

- eat healthy food
- be a healthy weight
- have healthy eating habits

Verdict

'Squeezy' foods are okay for occasional use when travelling or when you do not have enough time to prepare meals. They are **not** a replacement for healthy family meals. Mealtimes for young children are important for nourishment and for learning how food looks, smells and feels. When 'squeezy' foods replace real food, part of this learning is lost.

Tips

- Give children the opportunity to experiment with different food tastes and textures
- Avoiding squeezy foods helps protect children's teeth
- Encouraging children to chew, bite, and touch different foods strengthens their mouth muscles, promoting jaw and speech development and developing their fine motor skills
- Family shared mealtimes help children accept new foods; interact with the rest of the family; and makes it more likely they will have healthy diets in the future

1. Commonwealth of Australia 2009 Get Up & Grow Family Book. Department of Health