

Baby's First Words, 'What's the Purée of the Day?'

By [ALINA DIZIK](#)



Erin Kunkel

for The Wall Street Journal

Left to right: Cadie, age 4, Jack and Hannah at the Seesaw café; its kids menu is Danish- and Korean-inspired.

When a peacefully sleeping infant grows into a wailing, flailing toddler, it can quickly put the kibosh on dining out. So cafés and shops are cooking up healthy, gummable dishes, hoping that serving the tiniest diners will turn their parents into loyal customers.



It's not always easy to find restaurants that welcome noisy toddlers. One organic eatery in New York City is catering to the teething set, with healthy dishes for tots even a grownup would like. WSJ's Monika Vosough reports.

On the tykes' menu: puréed squash, organic chicken and even "babe-a-ccino"—a coffee-free cappuccino. Some restaurants are venturing into toddler territory for the first time, while others with a dedicated clientele of new parents are protecting their market by expanding kids' menus to include options for babies as young as eight months.

For Alberto Gonzalez, founder of GustOrganics, a casual New York restaurant, the baby-food revelation came three years ago.

"One of the managers used to see the mothers ordering regular food and processing the food to feed their babies," he says. Now the restaurant prepares organic dishes including a tenderloin beef purée with zucchini, carrot and bay leaf, and a dessert of banana and dulce de leche purée. Dishes made from scratch, without additives like salt, typically take 35 minutes to prepare, he says.



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Jack, age 2, drinks a babe-a-ccino at the Seesaw café in San Francisco, where menu offerings cater to tots.

Many parents begin to feel unwelcome in restaurants when their older babies and toddlers begin to voice their own demands and exercise independence, says Sabrina Gabel, owner of the Seesaw café in San Francisco, who also is a child psychologist. "They want restaurants to say, 'Yeah, we welcome you, and we welcome your kids. It's OK if they're a pain,' " says Ms. Gabel.

New parents say the draw of a place where their children are welcome and guaranteed a healthy meal keeps them coming back—no matter what else is on the menu.

Lauren Cohen, a banking analyst in New York and mother of two sons, 1½ and 4 years old, says the Peter Rabbit Organics line of packaged purées at [Starbucks](#) have been a lifesaver, allowing her to linger over her coffee.

"My younger son, all he'll eat at a restaurant is French fries, so it's convenient to have healthy options that he thinks taste so good," she says. Her kids have given a nickname to the pouches: "squeezies."



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Hannah, age 1, snacks at the Seesaw café.



Some 6,000 Starbucks cafés now carry both the apple-and-grape and banana-mango-and-orange fruit pouches, says Ben Ford, chief executive of Peter Rabbit Organics, who describes them "as a smoothie with no juice added." While Mr. Ford won't reveal numbers, he says company sales tripled this year in part because of the snacks introduced in 2010.

At Hopworks Urban Brewery in Portland, Ore., parents can order baby food while sipping the brewery's organic beer. Having suitable food available means parents "don't have to run home and feed their baby. They can stay longer and have another beer," says general manager Bill Dickinson.

The bar-restaurant buys premade baby food in three flavors. The food is heated and served with rubber baby spoons, he says. Baby food is also offered at its second location in Portland, called Hopworks BikeBar.



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For toddler snacking on the go: Beaba Stackable Formula and Snack Container, \$15 at Amazon.com.

Some restaurants aren't charging for baby food—as long as it brings parents through the door. Nifty Fifty's, a casual chain of diners around Philadelphia, offers complimentary jars of baby food.

At Harvest, a casual Louisville, Ky., restaurant that opened in April and specializes in local and seasonal cuisine, servers offer freshly made purées of farmer's-market vegetables for small children.

The baby food isn't on the menu, but servers are instructed to offer it and ask parents to specify which combinations.

So far, sweet potatoes have been a hit, says farmer and restaurant co-founder Ivor Chodkowski.

Some establishments strive to offer baby dishes with an air of sophistication, helping children mimic their parents.

At Seesaw, in addition to the Danish- and Korean-inspired kids' menu, Ms. Gabel offers the "babe-a-ccino," steamed milk with cocoa powder in a cappuccino cup, and the "tiny-ccino," a miniature version served in an espresso cup. All of the porcelain coffee cups are still intact, says Ms. Gabel, who owns the café with her husband.



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Plum Organics Dispensing Boon Spoon, above right, \$14 for two, at Amazon.com.

Still, inside the restaurant, there is sometimes an uneasy mix. Customers who come to work on their laptops are quickly annoyed by babies who cry. Parents, meanwhile, dislike getting dirty looks from people determined to work in silence. "Creating a family-friendly restaurant or café is not easy," Ms. Gabel says. "You get heat from all ends."

GustOrganics offers baby food only before 5 p.m. "At night the restaurant transforms. It's a different ambiance," Mr. Gonzalez says, adding that babies are still welcome in the evenings.

"If for some reason there is a family with a baby and [the family] is too noisy, what we do is we apologize and send [the customers around] them a drink."