

Baby talk

By David Feder, RD

WellnessFoodsOnline.com

The growing trends in healthful foods finally spilled over to better foods for babies and toddlers

The later early years

"I strongly believe that 'food for kids' is not merely a trend but a movement that is here to stay," says Jill Litwin, owner of San Francisco-based [Peas of Mind LLC](#). The maker of "all natural eats for growing kids" is one of the more innovative processors to grow out of the nascent category.

The company focused on actual menu-item innovation and on striving to stay ahead of the trend by "continuing to design really good, wholesome food for kids — not just food shaped (to appeal to) kids, or adult food portioned for kids," says Litwin.

Peas of Mind was an early adapter to the idea of the need for age-specific foods in this category (from ages 1 to around 6). As Litwin states, "Healthy, wholesome meal options for this age group are still very limited and parents are looking for choices they can feel good about feeding their children."

"This category will continue to grow because it is proven — through childhood obesity, diabetes and other health crises — that what we feed our children strongly affects their development," explains Litwin. "Children at this age have finished breast- or formula-feeding and are being introduced to solid foods and require different nutrients than an older child." She also notes the critical role early foods play in children's food choices in the future.

Peas of Mind's main product is Puffets. Described as "mini casseroles," the organic, hand-held offerings may be shaped like hockey pucks but they are typical of this new paradigm in kid foods in having a flavor and texture that appeal to adults as well (the "Nanna's Banana" ones are positively addictive).

Puffets function as complete meals designed to be easy for busy parents to prepare. Currently, they come in six varieties — Mamma's Pasta, Dalai Lentil, Black Bean Polenta, Eat your Greens, Carrot Risotto and the aforementioned Nanna's Banana. Some Puffet flavors are gluten- and/or dairy-free.

Each pre-cooked Puffet formulation was designed to contain ingredients from the four major food groups, including whole milk (for calcium), eggs (for protein and omega-3s), organic vegetables/fruits/beans (for vitamins and minerals) and grains.

Foods such as Puffets — firm enough to cut up and serve, yet soft enough for young children to chew and swallow— also encourage self-feeding, which is an important stage in childhood development, Litwin points out.