

CHEATER'S CHANA MASALA

Serves 4

Cooking time: 25 minutes (15 minutes active)

Traditional chana masala—a spiced chickpea stew you'll find on the menu of almost any Indian restaurant—is a complicated affair, with an ingredient list as long as your arm. We're not going there. Remember my mantra: New parents don't have time for authenticity! Instead, I've simplified things to make this a quick and easy dish based almost exclusively on pantry items. It still tastes warm and comforting, but you'll have dinner on the table in no time.

2 tablespoons vegetable oil	¼ cup water
1 medium onion, finely chopped	One 14.5-ounce can diced tomatoes, drained
One 1-inch piece of fresh ginger, peeled and grated, or ½ teaspoon ground ginger	Salt
2 garlic cloves, minced	2 tablespoons chopped cilantro
2 teaspoons ground coriander	1 teaspoon garam masala
2 teaspoons ground cumin	Juice of ½ lemon (about 1½ tablespoons)
½ teaspoon cayenne	Cooked brown rice, plain yogurt, and prepared chutney, optional, for serving
Two 15- to 16-ounce cans chickpeas, rinsed and drained	

1. Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium-low heat. When it shimmers, add the onion, fresh ginger, if using, and garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion is translucent but not browned, about 5 minutes.
2. Add the coriander, cumin, cayenne, and ground ginger (if not using fresh) and cook for 1 minute.
3. Add the chickpeas, water, diced tomatoes, and salt to taste and raise heat to medium. Simmer uncovered (if it spatters too much, cover it partially) until the sauce has thickened, 5 to 10 minutes.
4. Remove from heat, then stir in the chopped cilantro, garam masala, lemon juice, and salt to taste.
5. Serve over brown rice and top with a spoonful of yogurt and chutney, if desired.

MAKE BABY FOOD: Leave out the cayenne if you're nervous about spicy foods, and if you're wary of the acidity in citrus add the lemon juice after reserving baby's portion. This'll puree nicely (make sure to include some of the liquid), or you can serve it as finger food—just smash the chickpeas with a fork, to prevent a choking hazard.

MAMA SAID

“I went into this recipe both excited and skeptical, because chana masala is one of my absolute favorite dishes. Since we have yet to find a kid-friendly Indian restaurant in our neighborhood, I rarely get my fix. I really didn't think there was any way I could approximate that yummy spiciness at home, let alone from pantry ingredients without advance planning and a special trip to the store. But the proof was totally in the pudding—a fabulous success that I will make again and again.” —Jenn C., mom of one, Boston, MA

“Everyone liked this—even my picky three-year-old ate three chickpeas!—and the adults (me, my husband, mother-in-law) all had seconds. I used a few shakes of cayenne pepper, and that seemed like enough to make it interesting for the adults and not too spicy for the kids.” —Jennifer S., mom of three, San Diego, CA