



## **THE EARLY NUTRITION PROGRAMMING PROJECT**

Project Number: FOOD-CT-2005-007036

Acronym: EARNEST

**\*\* Media Release \*\***

**Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2006**

### **INCONSISTENCY ACROSS EUROPE AS TO WHAT IS 'BEST FOR BABY'S HEALTH'**

Information and advice in leaflets to mothers and in policy documentation for health professionals on infant feeding and the impact of Early Nutrition Programming varies between European countries, according to research revealed today (Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2006) at the EARNEST Research Consortium meeting.

Although the association between early nutrition and later health outcomes known as metabolic programming (or early nutrition programming) is well acknowledged amongst scientists and health experts, the extent to which this concept is being communicated to parents and in policy documents for professionals is not known. The frequency and content of statements on programming found in written materials aimed at parents produced by national government bodies, professional and consumer associations, special interest groups and industry, and in policy documents, were reviewed in five European countries (Finland, Germany, Hungary, Spain and England).

"Policy documents on infant nutrition in the five European countries studied included many statements on the effects of early nutrition programming, but less than 50% of such statements were substantiated by reference to the significant evidence base now in existence," states Dr Monique Raats, Theme 4 Leader for EARNEST (the EC-funded Early Nutrition Programming Project).

"Additionally there is considerable variation in these documents across countries as to the specific nature of the health outcomes needing to be addressed due to such programming" continues Dr Raats, "and little acknowledgement that such programming has potentially life-long effects."

In total 638 programming statements were found in articles aimed directly at parents with 76% of the 130 qualifying documents and 41.4% of the 161 qualifying magazine articles including such statements. The most frequently mentioned health outcomes for short-term programming were risk of infections

(30%), allergy (16%) and risk of diseases in general (14%) and for long-term programming obesity (22.9%), cardiovascular disease (14%) and health in general (14%).

In the 38 policy documents identified, 455 programming statements were identified covering 53 different health outcomes, the most frequent being allergy, obesity, gastrointestinal, development and growth and cognitive development. In only half of these statements were the duration of the effect of programming mentioned, and only 15% to the potential life-long impact.

Overall Spanish materials for consumers had the highest number of statements concerning programming (88.6%) whilst England had the lowest (42.2%).

Spain also had the highest score of referenced programming statements in their policy documents (93.6%) and Hungary the lowest (6.2%).

The science of Early Nutrition Programming is providing clear evidence of the importance of nutrition during pregnancy and infancy to an increased or decreased risk of developing disease in later life. Emerging research on programming must increasingly feature in policy documents and information for consumers to ensure best advice is being given to mothers and mothers-to-be.

“With increasing mobility of populations across the EC, it would be preferable if this advice and information were consistent,” concludes Dr Monique Raats.

## **ENDS/**

### **Notes for Editors:**

	% of articles for consumers containing Programming statements	% of statements in policy documents referenced to the evidence
Finland	45.8 (4)	50.0 (3)
Germany	50.8 (3)	24.2 (4)
Hungary	67.3 (2)	6.2 (5)
Spain	88.6 (1)	93.6 (1)
England	42.2 (5)	57.4 (2)

### **\*\*\* EARLY NUTRITION PROGRAMMING \*\*\***

#### ***What is it?***

The science of understanding how and why the food eaten by pregnant women and by baby in infancy affects the life-long health of the child

### ***What do we know already?***

Nutrition in the womb and infancy and birth-weight implicated in up to 50% of adult disease - heart disease, diabetes, obesity, bone health, impaired immune & gut functions all implicated.

### ***What's happening in Cambridge?***

- Celebration of the life and work of Dr Elsie Widdowson (Wed 13 Dec – part of the Nutrition Society Annual Meeting)
- Gathering of Nutrition Scientists & Practitioners from the UK & Europe (Thurs/Fri 14/15 Dec) to share and discuss Early Nutrition Programming latest developments within the EARNEST Research Consortium.

### **\*\*\* EARNEST\*\*\***

**The EARNEST Research Consortium** (The Early Nutrition Programming Project ENPP) funded by the European Commission brings together a multi-disciplinary team of scientists from European research institutions in an integrated programme of work including experimental studies in humans, modern prospective observational studies; and mechanistic animal work including physiological studies, cell culture models and molecular techniques. The ENPP consortium consists of a multi-disciplinary team of 40 partners (33 academic institutions, 3 industry, 4 small/medium-sized enterprises) in 17 EU countries with a coordinating centre in Munich. The project commenced in April 2005 and runs for 5 years. Detailed briefing paper available on request.

EARNEST's first Scientific Congress will be held in Budapest 20/21<sup>st</sup> April 2007 - [www.metabolic-programming.org](http://www.metabolic-programming.org)

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