

MEDIA RELEASE

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Baby friendly bacteria can help prevent development of eczema

Eczema is a distressing condition for both parents and babies – the raw, red skin is painful to see and it is difficult to stop small children from scratching it. At worst, it can mean having to wet wrap wriggly toddlers each day with bandages soaked in moisturisers. It usually starts in the first year of life and affects about 10% of infants. Although most children eventually grow out of it, about half will go on to develop another allergic condition, such as asthma or hayfever.

Recent progress in understanding the role of gut bacteria in the development of the infant's immune system has led to the hope that some of this suffering can be prevented in the future.

Clinical studies, presented at the International Symposium on Early Nutrition Programming in Granada (Wednesday 23rd April 2008) have found that certain types of bacteria residing in the gut of babies with a family history of allergic conditions can reduce the number of babies who go on to develop eczema.

"New and exciting insights on how gut bacteria affect immune function are emerging from these studies which we hope will support the use of pro- and prebiotics in primary disease prevention in the future," said **Dr Yolanda Sanz**, presenting the research in the Immune Function session of the Early Nutrition Programming Symposium. Dr Sanz is from the Institute of Agrochemistry and Food Technology (CSIC) in Valencia, Spain

Babies' guts are colonized by bacteria after birth and acquiring the right balance of the different bacterial strains is important for developing effective gut immunity. Gut immunity is the first line of defence and prevents the absorption and over-reaction to any trigger molecule causing allergy. Breast milk contains antibodies and natural prebiotics which promote the establishment of a healthy balance of gut bacteria and exclusively breast fed babies are less likely to develop eczema.

The studies presented at the International Symposium offer hope that, with the use of the right bacterial strains and appropriate prebiotic mixtures, babies' natural defences can be boosted and their risk of eczema reduced.

"This is exciting new scientific information that suggests a fairly straightforward way to help ease the burden of this condition on infants and their families," said Professor Philip Calder (University of Southampton, UK) Chair of the Immune Function session at the EARNEST Symposium.

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Professor Philip Calder and Dr Yolanda Sanz available for interview

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- **Probiotics are beneficial bacteria**
- **Prebiotics selectively stimulate the growth of beneficial bacteria in the gut**