



THE EARLY NUTRITION PROGRAMMING PROJECT

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**EARLY NUTRITION PROGRAMMING &
HEALTH OUTCOMES IN LATER LIFE:
Obesity & Beyond**
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PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS ACROSS EUROPE BEING DENIED CONSISTENT AND UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION ON WHAT IS NUTRITIONALLY 'BEST FOR BABY'

Information and advice in leaflets to mothers and in policy documentation for health professionals on infant feeding and the impact of Early Nutrition Programming¹ is lacking and varies between European countries, according to research revealed today (Friday 20th April 2007) at the EARNEST Symposium 'Early Nutrition Programming & Health Outcomes in Later Life: Obesity & Beyond' (Budapest, Hungary)

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, but currently this association is not reflected in communications aimed directly at parents nor in policy documents for professionals.

Researchers of the EARNEST Consortium identified the frequency and content of statements on 'early nutrition 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, across 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 from EARNEST.

Leaflets (130) and parenting magazine articles (161) from parenting magazines

¹ **Early Nutrition Programming** is 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. Nutrition in the womb and infancy and birth-weight is implicated in up to 50% of adult disease - heart disease, diabetes, obesity, bone health, impaired immune & gut functions.

providing information on feeding of healthy infants aged 0-12 months were identified and screened for nutrition programming statements. A total of 638 statements that related later health outcomes to early nutrition were found. Obesity was mentioned in 8.5% of the statements, and was the fourth most frequent outcome after allergy (20.7%), risk of infections (15.5%) and growth and development (11.4%). A temporal prognosis was given in 39% of obesity statements; 6% referring to short- (<5 yrs), 13% to medium- (5-15 yrs) and 20% to long-term (>15 yrs) duration of effects. So obesity focuses on the intrinsic long-term perspective of programming in contrary to other surveyed health-outcomes with only 8% considering a lifelong approach.

The major programming related behaviour concerned breast-feeding (47% overall, Hungary and Spain were 100%) rather than formula and complementary feeding with significant differences ($p < 0.01$) concerning the recommended duration: for Spain and Hungary the dominating advice was exclusive breast-feeding for 6 months, for Germany exclusive breast-feeding for 4-6 months and for UK and Finland breast-feeding without further specification.

Programming of later obesity has been integrated extensively in consumer information and with a long-term perspective. However, these 5 European countries have slightly different breastfeeding recommendations. This is of importance as obesity and resulting lifelong sickness are an increasing public health concern in developed countries.

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, practical guides such as Infant Growth Rate Charts, 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, for all EC citizens, if advice and information on maternal and infant feeding for professionals and for consumers were consistent,” concludes Dr Monique Raats.
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Country	% 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)

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