

Need for debate on when babies should eat solids

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A University of Adelaide researcher says it's time for Australia's health authorities to rethink advice on how long women breastfeed their children exclusively.

Dr Brian Symon, Clinical Senior Lecturer in General Practice at the University of Adelaide and an expert on young children's [sleeping problems](#), says there is growing evidence to suggest that exclusive breastfeeding may not provide enough nutrition for all children from four months of age.

Currently in Australia, [health authorities](#) recommend that women exclusively breastfeed in the first six months of their baby's life. These are based on World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations.

Speaking in the lead up to World Breastfeeding Week (1-7 August), Dr Symon says he became concerned about the issue because he was seeing a large number of young children with sleeping, feeding and [weight gain](#) problems.

He led a two-year, self-funded study to review all research into breastfeeding to better understand the problem.

"Breastfeeding is extremely important for children's early life, but there is evidence that the emphasis on exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months may be linked to certain health problems," Dr Symon says.

"This includes the rapid increase in food allergies among children, which is a major and growing problem in our society. Some studies suggest that delaying the introduction of solids is contributing to this problem.

"One of my biggest concerns as a GP is the impact that emphasising exclusive breastfeeding has on the mother's confidence, self-esteem and general wellbeing. Postnatal depression is reported to exist in up to 15% of Australian mothers. As a clinician working with [breastfeeding mothers](#) on a daily basis, it is evident that some women are unable to meet the full energy needs of their child from their own milk.

"Children who do not start receiving complementary solids from four months of age are often hungry, sleepless and upset."

Dr Symon says there is [clear evidence](#) for the benefits of breastfeeding, "but limited evidence that these benefits are amplified by making it exclusive".

"It's time we revisited the national recommendations to provide the best possible health advice for parents," he says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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