

Right amount of fat and protein, key to babies

December 11 2013

The early childhood diet and that of the mother during pregnancy determines the health of a child later life. This is the claim that the EU-funded research project Early Nutrition is trying to substantiate by the time it is due to be completed in 2017. Hans van Goudoever, professor of paediatrics and chair of the department of paediatrics at VU University Medical Centre, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, talks to youris.com about his hopes to drastically improve the health of future generations by giving nutritional advice to pregnant women and young mothers.

Has the project produced any surprising results so far?

We have found a relation between nutrition in the first stages of life and a staggering amount of afflictions including obesity, heart diseases, [high blood pressure](#), cholesterol levels, as well as connections to IQ. And we are now close to practical application. For instance, we found that young infants with a low-protein diet are far less likely to suffer from obesity in later life. So we have developed bottle feeding with less protein and we are tested it on piglets. The results are excellent and tests on humans are about to start.

Why do we need to study early nutrition?

Epidemiological studies, which go back as far as 25 years, have shown

that birth and infant weight have an effect on the occurrence of cardiac problems later in life. But that is just a description of a relation, not a scientific proof. These days we want hard evidence. One group of children will get nutrition type A, another group will get type B. Then, we'll keep following them in order to prove there is a specific effect. That's what the project is all about.

At what stage is it possible to influence child nutrition most?

Nutrition during pregnancy and the first months of life is key. Later on, there is still an influence but it gets smaller with time. After birth, the choice between breast feeding and [bottle feeding](#) is very easy, from a nutrition perspective. Breast feeding is at least ten miles ahead. I know there are many reasons why sometimes breastfeeding is impossible; the mother may not have the opportunity, or she is taking medicines. But if at all possible every effort should be taken to choose [breast feeding](#). It is logical after all. Bottle feeding is made from cow milk, and cows are different from people.

What advice could you give to mothers of very young children?

Above all, avoid excess proteins and fat. Special care should be taken to make sure babies have a diet wherein the protein and fat content is just right. Not too little, but certainly not too much.

If you have a normal diet, you do not need anything else. Just forget about extra vitamins and minerals, as long as your diet is balanced. That is not easy these days. The groups where we see the most problems include, quite often, the people from the lower social classes, who are rather difficult to reach with information or [nutrition](#) campaigns. What I

do hope is that we can ultimately get the message across to the hard-to-reach public.

Provided by Youris.com

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