# Medical Xpress

# Puree helps kids make smooth transition to vegetables

November 12 2014

Adding tiny amounts of vegetable puree to milk and then rice at the time of weaning makes children more likely to eat vegetables, new University of Leeds research shows.

Infants who consumed either milk (breast milk or formula) followed by rice mixed with vegetable puree ate nearly half as many vegetables again as infants who ate just milk followed by baby rice.

Professor Marion Hetherington, of the School of Psychology at the University of Leeds, led the study. She said: "We took inspiration from French mothers, as previous studies in this area have shown that they often add vegetable cooking water to their infants' milk to help introduce them to eating vegetables at weaning. For years, French mums have shown that getting their children to eat vegetables early is child's play."

In the project, 36 mothers with babies aged from six months were split into two groups. One group was given plain milk for 12 consecutive days followed by plain rice for 12 consecutive days.

The other group was given milk with added vegetable puree for 12 days followed by rice with vegetable puree for 12 more days.

After this, both groups were given vegetable puree for 11 consecutive days, and this is where the difference in intake was observed.

Vegetables were given in a rotation, with carrots, green beans, spinach

and broccoli used. Carrots were by far the most popular vegetable among the infants, being much more readily eaten than green beans, spinach or broccoli.

Professor Hetherington continued: "What this study shows is that by doing a relatively simple thing, like adding vegetable puree to milk and then baby rice, children eat vegetables more readily. Vegetables tend to be bitter, so a gradual introduction is an easy way to let children get used to them.

"Breast milk contains flavours carried from the maternal diet to the infants, so it is important for mums to eat a variety of vegetables and to maintain a healthy diet, too."

The research was published in the journal *Appetite* and is available online.

Danone Nutricia Research was partner in this EU-funded project and involved in the design of the study, as academia-industry co-operation is a condition of European Union funding for the project.

NHS guidelines advise to start weaning children on to solid foods at around six months. During the study, parents were given the option of either bottle-feeding or spoon-feeding the mixture to their babies.

Professor Hetherington is part of the Human Appetite Research Unit (HARU) at the University of Leeds. Her research in the HARU Lifespan group involves characterising appetite expression from the early years of life to the end of life. In particular the group is interested in the development of food preferences in early life, the expression of hunger and satiety cues in infancy and how mothers respond to these.

Professor Hetherington added: "This was a small sample size, but it is

important to note that we are focussing more and more on the first 1000 days of life as evidence is increasing that these are particularly important for later health and the development of healthy eating habits."

  **More information:** "A step-by-step introduction to vegetables at the beginning of complementary feeding: The effects of early and repeated exposure", by Hetherington et al, [www.sciencedirect.com/science/ …](www.sciencedirect.com/science/) [ii/S0195666314004942](ii/S0195666314004942)

Provided by University of Leeds

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