

# Study debunks concerns about baby feeding methods

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What, and how, a baby is fed can weigh on a caregiver's mind. Thankfully, a University of Otago-led study has found two popular, but somewhat controversial, methods appear to have little significant impact

on infants' appetite and weight.

The study analyzed the diets of 625 7 to 10-month-old [babies](#), evaluating appetite-related outcomes of baby food [pouch](#) use and baby-led weaning.

Lead author Alice Cox, Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Medicine, says concern is frequently expressed about babies who consume baby food pouches being at risk of overfeeding, and those who are baby-led weaning being at risk of underfeeding.

[The study, published in \*Appetite\*](#), is part of the First Foods New Zealand study conducted at Otago and Massey universities.

Parents report liking baby food pouches because they are convenient and easy to use on-the-go.

"Although the food itself is similar to the food in baby food jars and cans, the pouches have a nozzle so babies can eat directly from the pouch instead of being fed by someone using a spoon.

"Some health professionals are concerned that using baby food pouches might lead to overfeeding or might change the way that eating behavior develops—however, so far these concerns seem to be based on opinion and not [scientific evidence](#)," she says.

The researchers found 28% of babies were using baby food pouches daily or almost daily. Those who were having pouches frequently were more likely to eat when offered food even if they weren't hungry. However, those who did consume pouches frequently didn't eat more food overall than those who didn't have them as often.

"Despite making up about 70% of the infant foods available commercially, baby food pouches seem to make up a relatively small

proportion of food intake for babies in New Zealand," Cox says.

Baby-led weaning is another feeding method which has become popular in recent years.

"One of the key features of baby-led weaning is that infants feed themselves age-appropriate 'finger foods,'" like cooked carrot sticks, from as soon as they have their first solid foods.

"Advocates say this may lower the risk of overfeeding and lead to healthier eating behaviors. On the other hand, some [parents](#) and health professionals worry about things like whether young infants are able to feed themselves enough [food](#) if they are not spoon-fed."

The researchers found infants following a baby-led approach in New Zealand are growing as well as those who are spoon-fed and are no more likely to be over or underweight.

At about 6-months of age, 13% of the babies in the study were mostly or always feeding themselves. When they were a couple of months older, this increased to about 25%.

Babies who followed baby-led weaning seemed to be able to eat to their appetite better than babies who were spoon-fed. They also got slightly more energy from foods than babies who were spoon-fed, but not enough to affect their weight.

"We were actually surprised to learn that babies who followed baby-led weaning ate a little bit more than babies who were spoon-fed. This may have been due to the differences in the types of foods that they were offered, and we're looking at this now."

Cox hopes the findings will be useful for developing guidelines for

[health professionals](#) and whānau when they're deciding how best to feed their baby.

"It is important that babies are given the best possible start—working out what might be best nutritionally is an important part of this."

**More information:** Alice M. Cox et al, Baby food pouches and Baby-Led Weaning: Associations with energy intake, eating behaviour and infant weight status, *Appetite* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.appet.2023.107121](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2023.107121)

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