

Babies weaned on home-cooked fruit, veg more likely to eat '5 a day' as children

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(Medical Xpress) -- Babies weaned on home-cooked fruit and vegetables are more likely to eat fruit and vegetables as children, according to recent research.

Dr. Helen Coulthard from De Montfort University Leicester, in collaboration with the universities of Bristol and Birmingham, analyzed data from the Bristol-based Children of the 90s study.

They discovered that feeding babies home-cooked or raw fruit or home-cooked vegetables was associated with an increase in [consumption](#) and variety of fruit and vegetables in children aged seven.

Weaning babies on ready-prepared fruit and vegetables, such as baby food jars and packets, made no difference to the increased eating of fruit and vegetables.

Dr. Coulthard said: "The range and type of foods that young children eat is becoming an increasing cause for concern, in particular children do not seem to be eating the amounts of fruit and vegetables recommended for health.

"In 1998 the average intake of fruit and vegetables in young children in the UK was two and half portions a day. There have been and continue to

be many initiatives to increase this figure to the recommended five portions a day.

"It is interesting that feeding babies ready-prepared fruit and vegetables at six months had no positive effect on later fruit and vegetable consumption.

"This may be due to the fact that infants are fed types of vegetables in ready-prepared foods that the family do not usually eat. It may also be that mothers who use ready-prepared foods do not eat as much fruit and vegetables themselves or are more likely to rely on convenience foods.

"In addition fruit and vegetables from packets, jars and tins are likely to have a uniform taste and texture, whereas those cooked at home or eaten raw will vary according to the variety of the particular fruit or vegetable, whether it is in season and the cooking method. These variations in the taste and texture of fruit and vegetables should expose an infant's palate to a wider range of experience, increasing the likelihood they will accept a wider range of foods."

The study also shows that the age of introduction and the frequency of exposure to home-cooked vegetables affected intake.

Babies weaned earlier, between four and six months, and exposed to fruit and vegetables regularly, had higher levels of consumption.

Those weaned later, closer to the six months recommended by the World Health Organisation, and given fruit and vegetables less frequently were likely to eat fewer vegetables at seven years of age.

However, infants who were introduced to home-cooked vegetables at a later age but given them more frequently had levels of intake at seven years comparable to those infants who had been introduced to vegetables at an earlier age.

This suggests that mothers who decide to introduce solid foods at a later age should feed their infants a variety of fruit and vegetables more frequently to increase exposure to a variety of tastes in this crucial period of feeding.

Dr. Coulthard added: "The study shows that weaning a baby between four and six months on home-cooked or raw fruit and home-cooked vegetables increases the likelihood that they will eat fruit and vegetables as children.

"It is also interesting that consumption of ready-prepared vegetables was negatively associated with the consumption of green vegetables in children at seven years of age. Green vegetables tend to have a slightly bitter taste and babies may need to try them several times before they will eat them.

"The research has provided evidence that the early weaning period is an important time for the introduction of fruit and vegetables and that exposure in this period is a good indicator of later frequent consumption of fruit and vegetables.

"It is likely that mothers who place importance on providing their child with a diet that is high in fruit and vegetables will start this process during the early weaning period.

"Health workers should encourage the introduction of home-cooked fruit and [vegetables](#) rather than ready-prepared baby foods to infants during the weaning process. High levels of [fruit](#) and vegetable feeding should be recommended early in the weaning process to optimize the effects of exposure."

The study is based on information collected from more than 7,500 mothers of infants born in and around Bristol in 1991 and 1992 as part of the Children of the 90s study, a long-term research project which monitors the health and development of the [children](#) and their parents.

Provided by University of Bristol

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