

Infant feeding patterns over the first year of life: influence of family characteristics

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVES: Early eating patterns and behaviors can determine later eating habits and food preferences and they have been related to the development of childhood overweight and obesity. We aimed to identify patterns of feeding in the first year of life and to examine their associations with family characteristics.

SUBJECTS/METHODS: Our analysis included 1004 infants from the EDEN mother-child cohort. Feeding practices were assessed through maternal self-report at birth, 4, 8 and 12 months. Principal component analysis was applied to derive patterns from breastfeeding duration, age at complementary food (CF) introduction and type of food used at 1 year. Associations between patterns and family characteristics were analyzed by linear regressions.

RESULTS: The main source of variability in infant feeding was characterized by a pattern labeled 'late CF introduction and use of ready-prepared baby foods'. Older, more educated, primiparous women with high monthly income ranked high on this pattern. The second pattern, labeled 'longer breastfeeding, late CF introduction and use of home-made foods' was the closest to infant feeding guidelines. Mothers ranking high on this pattern were older and more educated. The third pattern, labeled 'use of adults' foods' suggests a less age-specific diet for the infants. Mothers ranking high on this pattern were often younger and multiparous. Recruitment center was related to all patterns.

CONCLUSIONS: Not only maternal education level and age, but also parity and region are important contributors to the variability in patterns. Further studies are needed to describe associations between these patterns and infant growth and later food preferences.

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