

Breast-feeding duration and child eating characteristics in relation to later vegetable intake in 2–6-year-old children in ten studies throughout Europe

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Breast-feeding is thought to facilitate young children's acceptance of new foods, including vegetables, but the evidence for this relationship appears inconsistent across studies. Increasing children's vegetable intake remains challenging; therefore the present study aimed to investigate whether breast-feeding duration predicts vegetable intake in 2–6-year-old children.

Design: Actual vegetable intake was measured in studies across three European countries. General linear model analyses with breast-feeding duration, sex and age of the child and maternal education as variables were used to predict children's vegetable intake per country. Additionally, the relationships between child eating behaviour characteristics (asked through the Child Eating Behaviour Questionnaire) and vegetable intake were investigated via Pearson correlations.

Setting: Daycare centres, schools and home settings in Denmark, Greece and the Netherlands.

Subjects: Children aged 2–6 years (n 750).

Results: Breast-feeding duration was positively associated with children's vegetable intake at 2–6 years old in Denmark ($P < 0.01$) and the Netherlands ($P < 0.05$), but not in Greece ($P = 0.17$). Age of the child, maternal education and sex of the child did not predict vegetable intake in our sample. All countries showed an inverse relationship between food neophobia and children's vegetable intake and a positive relationship between vegetable liking and intake.

Conclusions: The present study found that breast-feeding duration is a predictor of later vegetable intake, but that current child eating behaviour characteristics, such as vegetable liking, food neophobia and enjoyment of food, also influence vegetable intake. Besides encouragement of breast-feeding duration, strategies that support vegetable liking and food enjoyment and decrease food neophobia are needed to support young children's vegetable intake.