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**What are babies made of? Research shows for some it is sugar, salt and not all things nice**

Children as young as four weeks old are being fed a poor diet of biscuits, ice-cream and soft drinks, according to new Australian research.

A study published in the journal *Nutrition & Dietetics* found some month-old babies had been introduced to high fat, salt and sugar foods, despite health authorities recommending exclusive breastfeeding to six months of age.

Researcher Jane Scott and colleagues tracked 587 women from two Perth maternity hospitals through regular phone interviews for 12 months to understand how the new mothers fed their babies.

“Almost one in four mothers had introduced fruit juice, biscuits and cakes to their infants by six months of age. This is a worry because eating habits developed early in life usually continue throughout a person’s lifetime – and an overweight child is much more likely to become an overweight adult,” said Associate Professor Scott, of the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Flinders University, Australia.

The study found babies who were started early on solids, and also those with two or more siblings, had a greater chance of eating high fat, salt and sugar foods by their first birthday.

In a recent Australia-wide survey, up to 20 per cent of children aged two to three years were found to be overweight or obese<sup>1</sup>, indicating that the problem of children being overweight starts early in life.

Dietitians Association of Australia spokesperson and obesity expert Professor Clare Collins said: “What newborns eat does matter. Babies need breast milk, not biscuits, ice-cream and soft drinks. Parent need more support to optimise breastfeeding

initiation and duration rates, and we need ways to make it easier for parents to feed their children right.”

“Infants and children are dependent on adults to choose the foods that will be best for them. Both eating habits and body weight track from childhood into adulthood, so getting off to the right start is crucial.

“What happens at home has the biggest effect on what children eat, so any effort to address children being overweight and obese must start at home. Australian parents need specific, evidence-based recommendations on what food and drinks are suitable for newborn babies, similar to the guidelines which are available for children older than five,” said Professor Collins.

She called for better support for and promotion of breastfeeding, which she said is one of the most important factors in the long-term health of newborns.

## ENDS

<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). *2007 Australian National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey: Main Findings*. CSIRO Preventative Health National Research Flagship and The University of South Australia. Available at: [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/66596E8FC68FD1A3CA2574D50027DB86/\\$File/childs-nut-phys-survey.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/66596E8FC68FD1A3CA2574D50027DB86/$File/childs-nut-phys-survey.pdf)

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**This study is published in the September issue of the journal *Nutrition & Dietetics*. Media wishing to receive a PDF of this article may contact [healthnews@wiley.com](mailto:healthnews@wiley.com)**

**Full Citation:** Gloria A. KOH, Jane A. SCOTT, Wendy H. ODDY, Kathleen I. GRAHAM, Colin W. BINNS; Exposure to non-core foods and beverages in the first year of life: Results from a cohort study; *Nutrition & Dietetics* 2010; 67: 137–142; DOI: 10.1111/j.1747-0080.2010.01445.x

**About the author:** Jane Scott is an Associate Professor and Head of Academic Programs at the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia.

**To arrange an interview** with Associate Professor Scott, please contact Charles Gent, Flinders University on [charles.gent@flinders.edu.au](mailto:charles.gent@flinders.edu.au).

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