Early Infant Feeding and Obesity Risk

In the past 10 years, researchers have learned a great deal about ways in which infant feeding practices impact health in childhood and beyond. One of the important findings is the relationship between early infant feeding and obesity risk.

*Early infant feeding* means starting to feed a baby solid foods such as rice cereal or pureed baby foods before age 6 months. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breastfeeding until age 12 months and introducing solid foods after age 6 months.

**Infant Feeding Practices Study II**
A large research study called the Infant Feeding Practices Study II studied infants from the third trimester of pregnancy to age 12 months and then contacted them 6 years later to understand their nutrition and health outcomes. Key findings from that research study include the following:

1. The longer a mother waits to introduce solid foods or drinks other than breast milk, the lower the chances are that the child will have ear infections, throat infections, or sinus infections at 6 years of age.
2. Children who breastfeed longer drink water and eat fruits and vegetables more often at 6 years of age and drink fruit juice and sugar-sweetened beverages less often at this age.
3. Children who drink sugar-sweetened beverages such as soda or juice during the first year of life are twice as likely to drink these types of beverages at 6 years of age.
4. Children who rarely eat fruits and vegetables during the first year of life are more likely to continue this pattern of rarely eating fruits and vegetables at 6 years of age.

From this research study, we can conclude that establishing healthy eating behaviors early in life is critically important and can predict eating behaviors later in life that may affect obesity and other health concerns. Other studies indicate that excessive weight gain in the first 6 months of life, resulting in crossing 2 or more percentile lines, increases the later risk of obesity.

**Recommendations for Parents**
1. Breastfeed: Breastfeeding is the best nutrition available for your baby; the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breastfeeding until age 12 months.
2. Solid foods: Avoid introducing any solid foods, including rice cereal or pureed baby foods, until after age 6 months.
3. Juice: Avoid giving your child sugar-sweetened beverages such as juice or soda during the first 6 months of life; these beverages offer no nutritional benefits at this age. Between ages 1 and 6 years, limit juice to a maximum of between 4 and 6 oz per day. Seek out juices that are 100% juice. It is always a healthier option to give your child plain milk or water instead of soda, sports drinks, or fruit juice.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**
http://www.cdc.gov/ifps/index.htm

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**Resource:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention