

Eating Behaviors and Infant Feeding Habits

Breastfeeding Diet Feeding Behavior

Infant Formula Pregnancy

Read the published, peer-reviewed paper here: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35764453/>

Citation

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General Summary

The eating habits of mothers are linked to how they feed their babies. How babies are fed can impact their health and development. Our study of 40 pairs of mothers and infants found no differences in the eating behaviors or feeding practices between breastfeeding and formula feeding mothers. However, among breastfeeding mothers, those with strong self-control tended to exert pressure or overfeed their babies. Conversely, among formula-feeding mothers, those who struggled with controlling their eating and often felt hungry were more inclined to limit their infants' food intake. Understanding these connections is important for the health of mothers and babies.

How will the results help children, parents, and people who care for them?

Our results suggest the important value of educating parents and caregivers on how early life eating behaviors are related to long-term eating behaviors. Bringing awareness to this connection provides support for educating parents and caregivers on appropriate infant eating and feeding behaviors. The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, which is a federal assistance program that supports healthcare and nutrition of pregnant and postpartum women with low-income, is a great avenue to provide such educational content to parents and caregivers. In this cohort of mothers with low-income, maternal eating behavior was associated with infant feeding styles only when feeding modality was considered. Mothers may benefit from education on how their own eating behaviors can influence those of their infants and children. The purpose of this study is to find out whether eating behaviors in mothers with low-income relate to their attitudes toward infant feeding and whether these associations are different between breastfeeding and formula-feeding mothers.

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Who was involved?

The participants in this study were postpartum women who were at least 18 years or older that had either overweight or obesity and were enrolled in the Louisiana Women, Infants, and Children program. Women had to be between 6 and 8 weeks postpartum. Overweight and obesity was defined as having a body mass index (BMI) between 25 to 39. Information from a total of 40 mother-infant pairs was used for this study.



How did we get the results and findings?

The results and findings of this study were based upon information collected from 40 mother-infant pairs. Mothers were categorized as either breastfeeding or formula-feeding. We measured height and weight and asked questions about maternal eating behaviors and infant feeding practices.





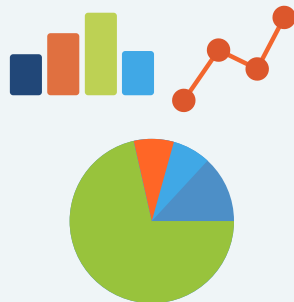
What was unique about this study? How were patients given a voice in research?

Our study uniquely focused on WIC mother infant pairs in Louisiana. Potential relationships may exist between infant feeding styles and coping with stress that are unique to disadvantaged populations. This study contributes to this area of research.



What were participants asked to do during the study?

Between 6 to 8 weeks after giving birth, participants completed an in-person visit at one of two collaborating WIC clinics in Baton Rouge or at Pennington Biomedical Research Center. During this visit, they were asked to complete a written informed consent, answer demographic questions (about age, race, education, etc.), complete measurements of their height and weight, and provide information about their own eating behaviors as well as the infant feeding styles they used.



Were there any limitations to the study?

The questions on maternal eating behaviors and infant feeding practices are based upon mothers self-reporting this information on questionnaires. Although this approach has been successful in other studies, it might not accurately capture the full extent of these behaviors as they take place in the home. Also, the sample used in this study reflects sampling bias. The information for the 40 mother-infant pairs used here came from women who volunteered to participate in a program to promote postpartum health and weight loss. These volunteers were already motivated for lifestyle behavior change, which may not be representative of postpartum women overall.



What did we learn?

Most mothers (68%) in this study fed their infants with formula. We found no differences in maternal eating behaviors and infant feeding styles between breastfeeding and formula-feeding mothers. However, maternal eating behaviors were related to infant feeding styles between breastfeeding and formula-feeding mothers. In looking at only mothers who feed their infants with formula, we found that maternal disinhibition (tendency to overeat) and perceived hunger (physiological signals for food consumption) were positively related to restrictive (restricted or controlled food intake) infant feeding. Also, the extent to which mothers applied pressuring/overfeeding behaviors was significantly higher among breastfeeding mothers with dietary restraint than formula-feeding mothers with dietary restraint. The majority of participants in this study were Black or African American (77.5%), did not hold a college or university degree (70%), and earned less than \$29,000 per year (72.5%). Both maternal age and education were higher among mothers who reported breastfeeding versus formula feeding. This cross-sectional analysis adds to the literature on the relationship between maternal eating behaviors and infant feeding practices in low-income mothers.



Why is this research important to patients, clinicians, and other researchers?

Early life eating practices and behavior may impact long-term eating behaviors and attitudes. These findings shed light on the important role mother's eating behaviors has on the eating habits of their child.

What's next?

Based upon these findings, future research could explore actual practices towards infant feeding styles. For example, having mothers with their own different types of eating behaviors participate in a laboratory simulation in how they prepare formula is one future avenue.

