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Supporting Good Nutrition from the Start for Infants and Toddlers:

Key Learnings from the Nestlé Feeding Infants and Toddlers Study (FITS)



The Nestlé Feeding Infants and Toddlers Study (FITS) is the largest and most comprehensive dietary intake study in the United States focused on what and how young children under the age of 4 eat on a given day. The latest findings from FITS 2016 provide much needed information on feeding practices, nutrient shortfalls and opportunities to improve the food patterns of infants, toddlers and preschoolers that may inform your recommendations and provide evidence for the development of the upcoming Birth to 24 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Below are some of the highlights.

Opportunities for Improvement

Start (and Stay) with Iron-rich Foods During Complementary Feeding

- Among 6-12 month olds, nearly 1 in 5 fall short on the recommended iron intake.ⁱ
- Dietary iron gaps have steadily increased among this age group since 2002.ⁱ
- Iron is critical to support brain development and learning, and is found in foods like beef and iron-fortified infant cereal.
- However, less than 5% are eating beef, and only about half of infants are eating iron-fortified infant cereal.ⁱⁱ

Boost Vegetables

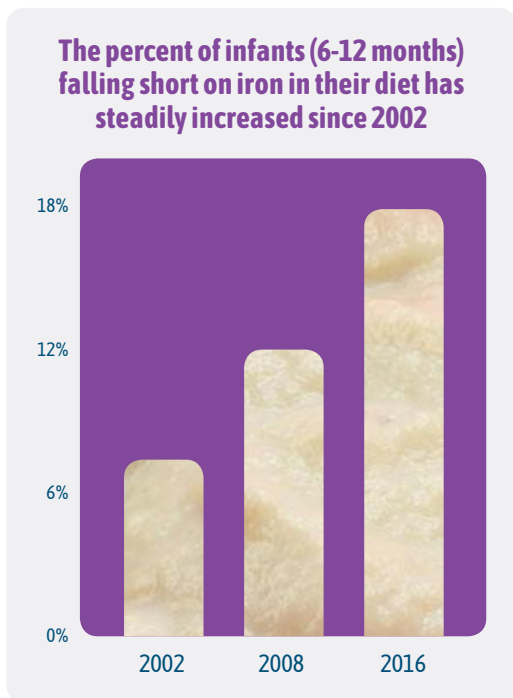
- More than a quarter of young children from 6 months to 4 years do not eat a single discrete vegetable serving on a given day. Among toddlers who do, French fries are the most common vegetable consumed.^{ii,iii}
- Parents should offer new pureed vegetables to infants 8-10 times to help increase acceptance of a variety of vegetables. For toddlers and young children, adding vegetables to their favorite meals can help increase acceptance.
- Mixed dishes such as kid-favorite pasta and bean-based meals can be a good way to get more veggies to toddlers and preschool aged children.
- Encouraging young children to eat more vegetables could help to improve some of the early nutrient gaps FITS found, such as fiber and potassium.ⁱ

Reduce Sodium and Sweets

- Forty percent of 1-year-olds and 70-75 percent of 2- to 3-year-olds consume too much sodium – exceeding the upper limit of 1,500 mg/day.ⁱ
- About 3/4 of young children consume sweets on a given day by 1 year, and nearly all (90%) by 2-3 years, including cookies, cakes and sweetened beverages.^{ii,iii}
- 1/3 of a toddler’s daily calories come from snacking. With 3/4 of toddlers eating fruit each day,ⁱⁱ there is opportunity to make fruit their sweet snack.

Improve Beverage Choices

- About 20% of young children do not drink milk on a given day, which provides essential calcium and vitamin D.^{ii,iii,iv}
- About 10 percent of infants 6-12 months, 30 percent of 1-year-olds and 45 percent of 2- to 3-year-olds drink sugar-sweetened beverages on a given day, with fruit flavored drinks being the most common.^{ii,iii,iv}



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Successes to Build on

Continue to Encourage Breastfeeding

- More mothers are breastfeeding, and for a longer duration. In 2016, 81% of children were ever breastfed, compared to 76% in 2002. Nearly one in every four 12-to-15-month-old continued to receive breastmilk, compared with 14% in 2002 and 2008.ⁱⁱ

Fruit

- Three quarters of children 6 months through 3 years eat fruit on a given day and fewer drink juice, ^{iii,iiii} an improvement over the 2008 FITS findings. Including fruit with meals and snacks is a great way to help build healthy diet patterns from the start.

Whole Grains

- More than half of young children (59%) consume whole grains including whole-grain rich cereal and breads.ⁱⁱⁱ Try swapping some of their other favorites like crackers, pasta, bread and rice for whole grain choices too. Aim to make half of grains whole.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The latest FITS findings demonstrate a need for strategies to improve young children's diets at the individual, community and policy level.

FITS can help inform the first ever Dietary Guidelines for Americans aged 0-2 years, which are slated for release in 2020. These guidelines will be instrumental in continuously improving pediatric practice guidelines and supporting parents and caregivers in providing a healthful diet to young children from the start.

FITS also helps to identify populations who may benefit from targeted interventions that aim to improve infant feeding practices and the development of dietary patterns. The FITS findings underscore the importance of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to ensure nutritional adequacy among infants and young children from low-income families.

FITS is the first survey to provide detailed dietary information on a national sample of children aged 0-4 years who participate in the WIC program before (2008) and after (2016) the WIC food package was modified in 2009. FITS found that infants and children participating in the WIC program are generally less likely to fall short on key nutrients including iron, zinc and vitamin D, and less likely to overconsume saturated fat compare to non-participants, speaking to the positive impact of the program.

STUDY BACKGROUND

Nearly 10,000 infants and young children have been a part of FITS, which was started by Gerber in 2002, and conducted again in 2008 and 2016. FITS 2016 surveyed parents and caregivers of 3,235 U.S. children under age four, including 1,500 infants. The FITS findings can help give young children a healthy start.

Visit [medical.gerber.com/FITS](https://www.medical.gerber.com/FITS) to access the study and learn more.

More than a quarter of children from 6 months to 4 years do not eat a single serving of vegetables on a given day

27%
not eating
vegetables



73%
eating
vegetables

More than half of preschool-age children now consume whole grains on a given day

41%
do not
consume
whole grains



59%
consume
whole
grains

ⁱBailey RL, Catellier DJ, Jun S, et al. "Total Usual Nutrient Intakes of U.S. Children (<48 mo): Findings from the Feeding Infants and Toddlers Study (FITS) 2016." *The Journal of Nutrition*. 2018;148(9S):1557S–1566S. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/nxy042>.

ⁱⁱRoess AA, Jacquier EF, Catellier DJ, et al. "Food consumption patterns of infants and toddlers: findings from the Feeding Infants and Toddlers Study (FITS) 2016." *The Journal of Nutrition*. 2018;148(9S):1525S–1535S. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/nxy171>.

ⁱⁱⁱWelker EB, Story M, Jacquier EF, et al. "Room for Improvement Remains in Food Consumption Patterns of Young Children Aged 2-4 Years." *The Journal Of Nutrition*. 2018;148(9S):1536S–1546S. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/nxx053>.

ⁱⁱⁱⁱKay MC, Welker EB, Jacquier EF, et al. "Beverage Consumption Patterns among Infants and Young Children (0–47.9 Months): Data from the Feeding Infants and Toddlers Study, 2016." *Nutrients*. 2018;10(7):825. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu10070825>.