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15 January 2008 Scientists from 16 different countries study the link between children's nutrition and the development of adult diseases such as diabetes or allergies

Researchers from the Department of Pediatrics of the University of Granada, in collaboration with another 38 universities and companies from 16 European countries, will study the effects of children's nutrition on the onset of cardiovascular problems, diabetes, obesity, allergies, weak bones, neuromotor functioning and children's behavioural aspects. The EARNEST project (The Early Nutrition Programming Project) aims to help in the development of policies, information campaigns, documents, guides and recommendations on the nutritional components of children's food, for the improvement of children's formulas. It also collaborates in the design of plans preventing and avoiding nutrition effects on the metabolism.

Thanks to this project, the University of Granada becomes the only Spanish investigation centre taking part in this ambitious initiative, the first of its kind in Europe. Cristina Campoy Folgoso, the professor heading this initiative in Granada, emphasizes that the "early nutrition programming" is quite a recent subject in the health and science field today. "Different studies show how food can have long-term consequences in children's growth and health during pregnancy, the breastfeeding period and childhood. Moreover, food can also have influence over the later onset of diseases", states the researcher.

Study of disease

This project aims to answer the question about the extent of nutrition effects of prenatal, postnatal, and infant diets of someone among the current European population in critical periods of development as well as the efficiency of actions preventing and avoiding long, medium and short-term metabolic effects on health.

The project will tackle randomly assigned clinical tests and nutritional interventions during pregnancy and childhood, pilot studies, tests on animals, cells and genomics, as well as social and economic studies connected with nutrition in the first stages of life and their significance in the development of later diseases.

The researchers hope to find the genetic mechanism of diseases such as diabetes and obesity with this project. "Obesity, a growing global epidemic, begins, partly, during child development –explains professor Campoy Folgoso-. It is known that breastfed children's growth kinetics differ from those fed with commercial foods. These children easily gain weight and height. Considering these consequences, linked with eating habits, the purpose of this project is to study whether breastfeeding can prevent a later risk of obesity.

About EARNEST

This investigation project is financed by the European Commission and is made up of 38 multidisciplinary groups of professionals from 16 European countries. Scientists from different institutions of all over Europe are involved in it: 33 academic institutions, 5 industries and 7 PYMES companies form the project, coordinated by Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich (Germany). It began in April 2005 and will last until 2010.

* Coordinator: Professor Berthold Koletzko. Dr. von Hauner Children's Hospital, Ludwig-Maximilians. Ludwig-Maximilians University, Munich, Germany.

* Institutions taking part: Medical Research Council-Institute of Child Health (London, United Kingdom); University of Pécs (Pécs, Hungary); University of Granada (Spain); University of London-Alliance (United Kingdom); Danish Epidemiology Science Centre (Copenhagen, Denmark); Aarhus University (Denmark); Instituto municipal de Investigació Mèdica (Barcelona, Spain); Inst of Public Health (Oslo, Norway); University of Bristol Alliance (United Kingdom); The Children's Memorial Health Institute (Warsaw, Poland); GSF National Research Centre for Environment and Health (Germany); University Hospital Groningen (Holland); Turku University Central Hospital (Turku, Finland); University of Nottingham (United Kingdom); Louvain Universities Alliance (Belgium); Rowett Research Institute (Scotland, United Kingdom); University of Cambridge (United Kingdom); Research Institute for the Biology of Farm Animals (Germany); Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (France); INSERM (Paris, France); RIVM National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (Holland); Institute of Physiology (Prague, Czech Republic); University Medical Centre (Utrecht, Holland); University of Surrey (United Kingdom).

* Companies: DNA testing Ltd (Scotland, United Kingdom); Schothorst Feed Research (Holland); Ashwell Associates (United Kingdom); RDE Software GmbH (Munich, Germany); Institute for Market Research, Strategy and Planning (Munich, Germany); Arexis (Gothenburg, Sweden); BioScientifica, (Bristol, United Kingdom).

* Industry: Numico (Friedrichsdorf, Germany); Ordesa, (Spain); Orafit (Belgium); Mead Johnson (USA); Nestlé International.

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