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Childhood nutrition: healthy kids, healthier adults

Early this year, scientists from 16 countries combined their efforts to begin studying the link between children's nutrition and the development of adult diseases such as diabetes or allergies

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The early years in a child's development have profound impacts on him or her well into adulthood, scientists are only now finding out just how far-reaching the impact of the early developmental years is for adult wellbeing, one European project is collating data that will help frame policy-making in the years to come.

Early this year, scientists from 16 countries combined their efforts to begin studying the link between children's nutrition and the development of adult diseases such as diabetes or allergies. This ambitious initiative is the first of its type in Europe with such an extensive reach.

Heading up this initiative is Professor Cristina Campoy Folgoso, who is keen to point out that 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,' she stated.

Financed by the European Commission, the EARNEST project or 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 for preventing and avoiding nutrition effects on the metabolism.

To achieve these aims, researchers from the Department of Paediatrics of the University of Granada have entered into collaboration with another 38 universities and companies from 16 European countries. Their combined efforts will help researchers create a more thorough understanding of the effects of children's nutrition on the onset of cardiovascular problems, diabetes, obesity, allergies, weak bones, motor neuron function and children's behavioural aspects.

The project will carry out randomly assigned clinical tests and nutritional interventions during pregnancy and childhood, pilot studies, tests on animals, cells and genomita. The team will also look at social and economic studies connected with nutrition in the first stages of life and their significance in the development of later diseases.

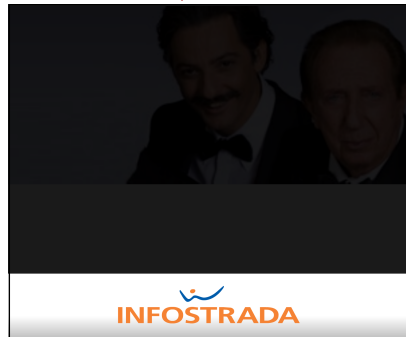
The researchers hope to find the genetic mechanism of diseases such as diabetes and obesity. It is common knowledge that breastfed children's growth kinetics differ from those fed with commercial foods. These children easily gain weight and height. 'Obesity is a growing global epidemic and begins, partly,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

The countries taking part in the project are Belarus, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.

For further information, please visit:

<http://earnest.web.med.uni-muenchen.de/index2.htm>

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