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A survey of new mums in five different European countries has found that most of them (85 - 90%) agreed that the way they fed their babies was important for their babies' long term health. The preliminary results of the survey were recently presented at the International Symposium on Early Nutrition Programming held in Granada, Spain.

Dr Heather Gage, from the University of Surrey, who presented the survey findings on behalf of an international group of researchers, said: "The number of new mothers who thought that the way they fed their babies had long term health implications was quite high considering this is a new and developing area of science. Especially as we have shown previously that it is not yet reflected in official advice to parents."

The survey was carried out in five countries across Europe: England, Finland, Germany, Hungary and Spain. Around 2000 first time mothers with healthy babies were asked about the way they intended to feed their babies and what were their beliefs about the associations between infant feeding and lifelong health.

Almost all mothers (95%) agreed that the way they fed their babies was important for their health in their first year of life. However, when mothers were asked about specific long term health conditions such as obesity, high blood pressure and cancer, they tended to think early diet was less important suggesting that they are not so clear about how diet might impact later health.

Dr Gage went on to say: "Once we have looked at our results in more detail, we hope we will be able to identify gaps in new mothers' understanding of the importance of early diet in different countries and recommend guidance on what sort of advice should be given in each country."

The mothers will be followed up when their babies are 8 months old to ask them about their milk feeding and weaning experiences.

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