

## Abstract

**Introduction and objectives:** Health organizations agree, that the introduction of complementary foods should take place at the earliest after the end of the 4th month (17th week) and no later than the end of the 6th month (26th week). The age of the child, at which mothers decide to start with the first complementary foods, can be influenced by many factors related to the mother or the child. The aim of this study is to identify these factors and to research their influence on the process of introducing complementary foods in the Czech Republic.

**Methods:** The data processed/presented in this paper were obtained from 2206 mothers from the Czech Republic who participated in an anonymous online questionnaire survey conducted during January 2024. The individual factors were determined based on their proven influence on the age of introduction of complementary foods in previous studies. The relationship between the individual factors and the age of introduction of complementary foods was statistically evaluated using the Chi-squared test of independence of contingency table at a significance level of  $\alpha = 0,05$ .

**Results:** The data revealed that 8.6% of children in the Czech Republic were given complementary foods before the end of the 4th month and 13% after the end of the 6th month. A number of factors were identified as predictors of early introduction of complementary foods, including lower maternal education level, younger maternal age, smoking, inability to breastfeed or early cessation of breastfeeding, higher maternal BMI and the fact that the mother was physically commuting during parental leave. Furthermore, the data showed that single mothers tended to start their children on complementary foods earlier than cohabiting women, but still maintained an appropriate time window for introducing complementary foods. Mothers who applied the "baby led weaning" method were more likely (41%) to introduce complementary foods after their children had reached the age of six months than mothers who did not follow this method (9.6%).

**Conclusions:** The finding that 22% of respondents did not introduce their complementary foods at the appropriate age of the child highlights the necessity for health workers to emphasize the benefits of breastfeeding and the importance of timing the introduction of complementary foods appropriately. This is particularly important for mothers who are less likely to follow health recommendations. The findings of this study may assist in the identification of at-risk groups of mothers and children, thereby ensuring more targeted education of mothers on the introduction of complementary foods.

**keywords:** introduction of complementary foods, complementary feeding, factors, infant, child nutrition