

Abstract

Introduction: Early childhood is a critical phase for shaping basic eating behaviors and food preferences that impact an individual long-term physical and mental condition. A little child takes over eating habits from his or her parents and their improvement later in life is difficult.

Methods: An analysis of eating habits of Czech children aged 12-23 months. The data was obtained in a cross-sectional retrospective questionnaire study. The questionnaires were completed by children's mothers addressed in public places.

Results: Almost a quarter (24.4%) of mothers still breast-fed a child after his or her first year of life and the toddlers were fed at average 4.3 times a day. The average age of child when his or her mother stopped its breast-feeding was 8.5 months. The most frequent reason of weaning the child was a paucity or loss of breast milk. More than third (38.5%) of children received the non-milk fluids before the end of the 6th month. And approximately one-third (27.8%) of children obtained the non-milk food before the end of the 6th month. Toddlers got the meals at average 5.3 times a day. Most (83.3%) of mothers had no difficulties with children's feeding. The most frequent eating problem was pickiness. In 28.0% of families the parents let the TV turned on during the mealtime and 58.3% of children could eat whenever they want. Purchased ready-made baby food was given to 74.6% of children less than 3 times a week. Mothers rather served own homemade food to the toddlers. Mothers gave the children rolls more frequently than bread. The average daily frequency of cooked vegetables consumption was 0.9 and that of raw vegetables 0.6. The average frequency of fresh fruit consumption was 1.3 times a day. Toddlers obtained milk at average 1.9 times a day. Toddlers consumed meat 0.6 times a day; red meat more often than poultry. Only 43.1% of children ate fish at least once a week. Children consumed ketchups, mustard, fried food and salty products (like crisps) rarely. Children drank water, fruit or herbal tea.

Conclusion: The findings of this research confirm that the breast-feeding duration extends and the children already establish the eating habits early in life. The dietary behaviour of young children might be improved by influencing parental habits and increasing the parental knowledge of correct child-feeding.

Key words: young children, nutrition, eating habits, consumption frequency, breast-feeding