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Parental sources of weaning information: An Irish perspective; preliminary results

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Statement of the Problem: The first 1,000 days are considered a sensitive period for fostering healthy eating in infants & toddlers. Early weaning increases the risk of obesity in later life. In Ireland, the Health Service Executive (HSE) adopted the WHO's global public health recommendation for infant feeding i.e., exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months (26 weeks) and introduction of solid foods at this time but not before 17 weeks. Health care professionals (HCPs) play a crucial role in the provision of evidence-based advice to parents. However, a recent Irish study investigating advice given to parents by HCP's regarding weaning indicated varying levels of knowledge. Parents, as a result, may be confused and look for alternative sources for guidance. The purpose of this study was to investigate parent's primary sources of weaning advice and examine their understanding of current weaning guidelines.

Methods: An on-line survey of Irish parents was conducted. A number of Irish parenting support organizations were approached and if they agreed, the recruitment poster was shared to advertise the study, along with a link to the survey.

Results: Survey response n=824, fully completed n=529 were ranked in order of the greatest sources of weaning information were as follows; 1) internet 2) books and magazines 3) friends with children 4) public health nurse and 5) family member. Majority of parents weaned in accordance to HSE guidelines, with 64% waiting until 26 weeks to wean.

Conclusions: This study showed that parents are more likely to use the internet, then books and magazines as source of information in relation to weaning advice. The majority of parents were adhering to recommendations. However, many mothers expressed frustration regarding conflicting advice received from different HCP's. To gain and maintain parental trust, there is a need for consistent advice to be given by all HPC's.

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