



REVIEW ARTICLE

Infant feeding: beyond the nutritional aspects[☆]



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KEYWORDS

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Infant feeding

Abstract

Objective: To draw attention to the importance of interaction between caregiver and child during feeding and the influence of parenting style on dietary habit formation.

Source of data: A search was performed in the PubMed and Scopus databases for articles addressing responsive feeding; the articles considered most relevant by the authors were selected.

Synthesis of data: The way children are fed is decisive for the formation of their eating habits, especially the strategies that parents/caregivers use to stimulate feeding. In this context, responsive feeding has been emphasized, with the key principles: feed the infant directly and assist older children when they already eat on their own; feed them slowly and patiently, and encourage children to eat but do not force them; if the child refuses many types of foods, experiment with different food combinations, tastes, textures, and methods of encouragement; minimize distractions during meals; and make the meals an opportunity for learning and love, talking to the child during feeding and maintaining eye contact. It is the caregiver's responsibility to be sensitive to the child's signs and alleviate tensions during feeding, and make feeding time pleasurable; whereas it is the child's role to clearly express signs of hunger and satiety and be receptive to the caregiver.

Conclusion: Responsive feeding is very important in dietary habit formation and should be encouraged by health professionals in their advice to families.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Alimentação
responsiva;
Práticas alimentares
parentais;

Alimentação infantil: além dos aspectos nutricionais

Resumo

Objetivo: Chamar a atenção para a importância da interação entre cuidador e criança durante a alimentação e a influência do estilo de parentalidade na formação do hábito alimentar.

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Estilos parentais; Alimentação infantil

Fontes dos dados: Foi realizada busca na base de dados PubMed e Scopus de artigos abordando a alimentação responsiva, tendo sido selecionados aqueles julgados mais relevantes pelos autores.

Síntese dos dados: O modo de alimentar as crianças é decisivo na formação do hábito alimentar, sobretudo as estratégias que os pais/cuidadores utilizam para estimular a alimentação. Nesse contexto, a alimentação responsiva tem merecido destaque, tendo como princípios-chave: alimentar a criança pequena diretamente e assistir as mais velhas quando elas já comem sozinhas; alimentar lenta e pacientemente, e encorajar a criança a comer, mas não forçá-la; se a criança recusar muitos alimentos, experimentar diferentes combinações de alimentos, de gostos, texturas e métodos de encorajamento; minimizar distrações durante as refeições; e fazer das refeições oportunidades de aprendizado e amor, falando com a criança durante a alimentação e mantendo contato olho a olho. Cabe ao cuidador a responsabilidade de ser sensível aos sinais da criança e aliviar tensões durante a alimentação, além de torná-la prazerosa; enquanto é papel da criança expressar os sinais de fome e saciedade com clareza e ser receptiva ao cuidador.

Conclusão: A alimentação responsiva é muito importante na formação dos hábitos alimentares e deve ser incentivada pelos profissionais de saúde, orientando as famílias como praticá-la.

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Introduction

Infant feeding is a subject that has aroused great interest in recent years in several fields of knowledge, as it involves different aspects beyond nutrition. Knowledge of the immediate and long-term impact of poor nutrition has contributed to the search for better understanding of how eating habits are formed and drawn attention to the importance of eating habits early in life.^{1,2}

Eating habits are influenced by numerous genetic, socioeconomic, cultural, ethnic, and religious factors, among others. Starting as early as the pregnancy period, through contact of the fetus with the amniotic fluid,³ the formation of eating habits continues during childhood, especially in the first 2–3 years of life, and will be influenced by different factors throughout life, such as family, friends, school, and media.^{4–7}

Infants, due to their biological immaturity, are totally dependent on others to feed them. These individuals, especially mothers because they are the primary caregivers of children, play a fundamental role in the construction of children's eating habits. In addition to deciding what the child will eat, they determine how the child will be fed.^{4,6}

The interaction between the mother/caregiver and child during the act of feeding/being fed has been the focus of research interest in recent years, because the caregiver's characteristics and how he/she relates to the child has a direct impact on the way a child will approach food. From this perspective, the parents' life habits, parenting style, and how they interact with their children are important for the formation of children's eating habits.^{4,8,9}

In the context of infant feeding, interaction during the meal can show two aspects: positive and negative. The positive one corresponds to the responsive feeding type, in which, for Black & Aboud,¹⁰ "there must be attention and interest in the child's feeding; attention to their internal signs of hunger and satiety; their ability to communicate their needs through distinct and significant signs, and the successful progression to independent feeding." The negative aspect, in turn, can be called non-responsive feeding, characterized by a lack of reciprocity between the caregiver

and the child, because during each instance, one of the two actors involved becomes dominant in the feeding situation, *i.e.*, sometimes the caregiver commands and dominates and sometimes the child controls the situation; or, the caregiver ignores the child.

The aim of this review is to show how the interaction between caregiver and child during feeding time and parenting style influence the formation of dietary habits.

Complementary feeding: beyond the nutritional aspects

Dietary habits early in life will have different effects throughout the life of individuals. In the first 6 months of life, it is recommended that the child be exclusively breastfed, as breast milk is the only food that can meet all nutritional and emotional needs of the infant during this period and provide an intense mother–child bond. Additionally, the existence of a positive association between duration of exclusive breastfeeding and healthier diet in later childhood has been postulated.¹¹

After 6 months of age, the exclusive use of breast milk is not enough, considering that the nutritional needs of the child are no longer met, thus requiring the gradual introduction of other food sources, by means of complementary foods.^{11,12} The duration of breastfeeding, which is recommended for two years or more, also seems to influence future eating habits.¹¹

Recently, worldwide, a greater incentive has been placed on the adequate practice of introducing complementary foods; however, progress toward this objective is still incipient when compared, for instance, with breastfeeding promotion.¹³ This finding is supported by studies showing the high prevalence of inadequate complementary feeding, such as, according to the European Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology, and Nutrition Committee on Nutrition¹⁴: early introduction of foods such as whole cow's milk; foods with inappropriate consistency and low caloric density; low bioavailability of micronutrients; insufficient supply of fruits and vegetables; contamination during the

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