

Current dietary habits of infants and toddlers in Belgium

Feeding habits early in life are important since they are related with the development of obesity and other health problems, such as high blood pressure, later in life. Prevention is the only feasible approach to control the problem of unbalanced nutrition in children and is best started early in life. To have a good understanding of the current dietary habits of Belgian infants and young toddlers, we asked the mothers of almost 500 healthy infants and toddlers (aged 6 months to 3 years old), to complete a detailed diary of everything their child ate and drank during a period of three days. This way, we could calculate the amount of energy, protein, fat, carbohydrates and fibre their children consumed during these three days and compare these findings with their respective recommended dietary intakes.

The median energy-intake was one-fifth above the recommended intake. As shown in the upper left panel of the graph, infant formula and milk (bright green boxes) were the main energy source for children up to the age of two years old. With increasing age, between the age of one and three years, the importance of cakes & sweets (light blue boxes) as energy sources rose significantly. An excessive energy intake can be expected to lead to an exaggerated weight gain in these children.

The median protein intake was 2-3 times the recommended amount. As shown in the upper right panel of the figure, milk (bright green boxes) appeared to be the most important protein source in children