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Prepared by: Cathi Lamp, Home Economist

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Survey Reveals Mothers Confused About Infant Nutrition Basics

Most mothers and mothers-to-be are seriously uninformed about five basic infant nutritional practices, according to a national survey conducted by the Institute of Pediatric Nutrition.

Most of the 323 women surveyed are uncertain about a range of nutritional issues including: when to introduce cow's milk into the infant's diet, whether fruit juice has any nutritional value, and how to deal with a low milk supply during breastfeeding. Additionally, the survey shows that mothers misinterpret normal spitting up as an allergic reaction and mistakenly believe iron-fortified formula causes constipation – misconceptions that can lead to improper feeding decisions.

An analysis of survey results shows that only five percent of mothers and mothers-to-be were able to provide accurate answers indicating they understood all of the following.

- Cow's milk should not be introduced when the baby starts eating solids.
- Fruit juice is not a nutritionally important part of the infant's diet.
- A breastfeeding mother with a low milk supply does not have to immediately switch to formula.
- Iron –fortified formulas do not cause fussiness and constipation
- Milk allergies are not the primary cause of frequent spitting up among infants.

The institute expressed concern that unfamiliarity with nutritional basics among parents could result in decisions that could affect the quality of the infant's nutrition and could put some infants at risk for impaired growth and development. Without proper nutrition, growth may slow, organs may not develop properly and the nervous system, including the brain, may not mature normally.

The nutritional issues raised by the survey are critically important because:

- Cow's milk is low in nutrients needed for development in the first year.
- Fruit juice does not supply the nutrients needed to support the appetite for either breastmilk or iron-fortified formula, which do supply those nutrients.
- Breastfeeding offers the best nutrition for an infant, and a healthcare professional can usually suggest ways to continue breastfeeding while monitoring

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growth and development, even when there is a concern about a low milk supply.

- Switching to the routine use of low-iron formulas can lead to iron deficiency anemia and put the infant at risk for impaired brain development.
- Confusion about what causes spitting up can result in premature discontinuation of breastfeeding and unnecessary formula switches.

Whenever possible, The Institute of Pediatric Nutrition recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first 4-6 months, and then breastfeeding and solids throughout the rest of the first year. The Institute also warns that an iron-fortified infant formula is the only appropriate substitute for breastmilk because formulas low in iron can put infants at risk for anemia, iron deficiency, and impaired development.

The Institute of Pediatric Nutrition, sponsored by Similac® Infant Formula, is dedicated solely to the education of parents and healthcare professionals about optimal nutrition for infants and young children, which should begin with breastfeeding. The Institute is an independent body of healthcare professionals whose affiliation with the Institute does not imply endorsement of any specific products. Parents can also receive free information on pediatric nutrition by phoning the Institute's toll-free number (800) 721-5BABY or (800) 721-5222.

Source: E-Mail, Joanne Ikeda, Misinformed Mothers, 11/3/1998.