

New mothers distrust advice from their mother-in-law about baby feeding

The biggest UK study of its kind has found that mothers do not rate advice from their partner's mother when making decisions about feeding their baby

PRESS RELEASE

It's not just men who ignore their other half's family. According to nutritionist Jo Travers, mothers are also highly likely to ignore advice from their mother-in-law (or partner's mother). In a major study she carried out in the UK earlier this year, the results of which have just been collated, she discovered that mums prefer to take feeding cues from their newborn than listen to advice from its paternal grandmother.

The aim of the study was to explore the importance placed on various influences on complementary-feeding practices. Quantitative data taken from the *largest nationwide survey ever undertaken into the degree that influencing factors affect complementary-feeding decisions* shows that almost two thirds of mothers did not value advice from their partner's mother: 66% of mums rated advice from their in-laws (or equivalent) as "not very important" or "not important at all".

Other factors that rated badly included advice from other family members, such as their own mothers; advice from friends; and labels on food packaging. Another significant finding was that advice from health visitors was also rated as "less than important" by nearly 60% of respondents.

Babies of complementary-feeding age are in a critical stage of development yet most mothers act against official (and family) recommendations. The mothers who introduced complementary foods before 26 weeks – the age recommended by the Department of Health – said that they did so because they felt that the baby was precocious and "ready".

Jo Travers says: "We found that mothers did not regard advice from their partner's mother as valuable when it came to feeding their baby. The paternal grandmothers were rated about the same as healthcare professionals, which was not as highly as it might sound."

The survey found that new mums mentioned these sources most as trustworthy, in decreasing order:

1. Their own feelings about what was right (91%);
2. Whether the baby was interested in solid food (86%);
3. Their baby reaching a certain age (82%);
4. Printed advice other than food labelling (70%); and
5. Previous experience (67%)
6. Advice from health car professionals other than health visitors (60%)
7. Advice from friends/other mothers (49%)
8. Advice from health visitors (41%)
9. The impression that the baby needed more nutrients (41%)
10. The baby seemed hungrier (39%)

Notes for editors:

Jo Travers is a practising, evidence-based registered Dietitian with a First Class BSc (Hons) degree in Human Nutrition & Dietetics from London Metropolitan University. Her experience in the field includes time working in the NHS throughout London as well as four years in private practice. She is the author of two recipe books and is available for interview.

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Methodology: The survey, a specific electronic questionnaire, was completed by 133 participants who had been recruited via a well-known online parenting forum. A second arm of the survey, with 10 participants, was conducted face-to-face at a baby clinic in southeast London. Frequency tables and chi-squared tests were used to analyse categorical data, and thematic analysis was carried out on qualitative data. A Likert scale was used when canvassing opinions. Ethics approval was granted by London Metropolitan University. Please contact Jo Travers to read the entire paper.

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