

Baby Steps

The latest news from the Baby Milk Study

Issue 5 Summer 2018

Baby Milk Study PROGRAMME
for Healthy Growth
and Nutrition



Welcome to the fifth edition of Baby Steps, the newsletter for participants and friends of the *Baby Milk Study*

What the Baby Milk Study was all about?

The *Baby Milk Study* was about understanding infant feeding, appetite, behaviour and growth, in the first year of life and beyond.

We know that almost 8 out of 10 mothers feed their babies formula milk by the age of six weeks. Researchers at the University of Cambridge worked with parents to find out what support was available for formula-feeding parents. They discovered that many families could be missing out on important feeding advice and wanted to work to improve this. So, in 2011, the *Baby Milk Study* was born!

Who took part in the project?

Between 2011 and 2015, 669 babies took part in the *Baby Milk Study*. Some families even took part more than once, with their next baby!

Parents were given information about the study by their GP, midwives, our research nurses, or via a letter from the NHS. They were recruited from across Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Suffolk.

What was involved?

The study offered a package of support to parents who were bottle-feeding. The programme, developed by researchers at the Centre for Diet and Activity Research (CEDAR) and MRC Epidemiology Unit in Cambridge, aimed to help parents achieve a healthy pattern of growth for their baby. Throughout the study, the *Baby Milk* team completed 1,877 measurement visits, more than 3,000 phone calls and travelled over 43,000 miles!

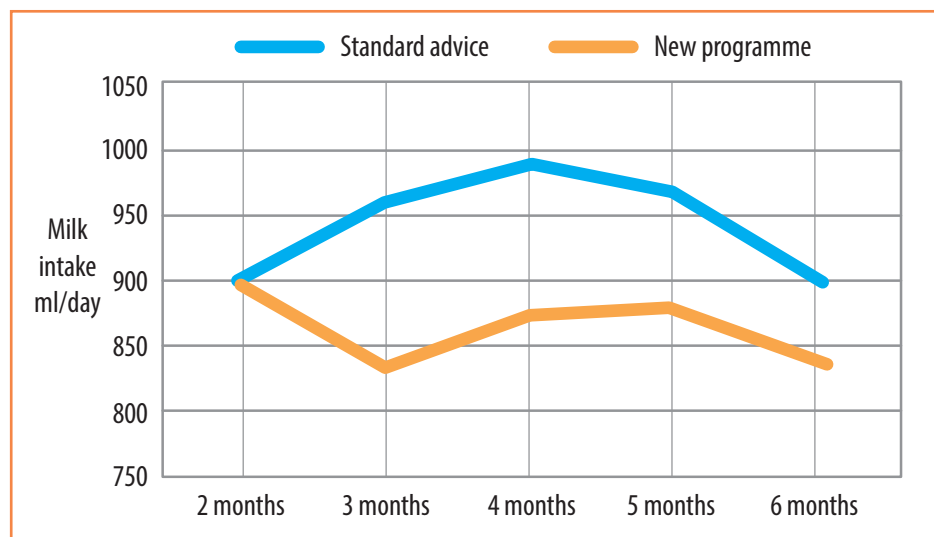


The Baby Milk Study Team

The study was a randomised controlled trial. This means that families were randomly allocated to receive either a new feeding programme, or standard advice about bottle-feeding. Support was offered through leaflets and monthly contacts with trained advisors. Babies and parents in the study were measured at the start of the study, at six months and at 12 months. Measures included baby's length, weight and head circumference, as well as questionnaires about their milk intake, sleep, appetite and temperament. In order to understand how the programme worked, information about mother's attitudes to feeding and growth, as well as their confidence, intentions and expectations about following feeding recommendations was also collected.

What were the results?

The new feeding programme was successful in reducing milk intake to the recommended amounts and in promoting a healthier pattern of weight gain to 6 months but not to 12 months of age. Babies in the standard advice group were fed more milk than is recommended for healthy growth.



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Mothers who received the new feeding programme reported being more confident about feeding their babies. They were more likely to recognise that it is possible to feed babies too much and were confident they knew how much they should feed their babies.

Average milk intake (ml/day) in the 'standard advice' and 'new programme' group babies.

What does this tell us?

This tells us that there is a need for more support for formula-feeding parents to help them to feed their babies the right amount for a healthy pattern of growth. Parents really valued the support they received. Over 90% completed the study.

The new programme was successful in supporting parents. However, this was only for the first 6 months when babies were mainly on milk-feeds, so more needs to be done to support parents through weaning and beyond.

The study also found inconsistency in advice on feeding from professionals, family and friends. There is a need for better guidance for professionals and for a change in our wider culture regarding infant feeding and weight gain.

'To have something there that could offer that sort of support and advice and a bit of guidance, was just great, to be honest.'

Study participant

'I don't think there's a great deal of guidance, obviously you get what's on the tin which tells you a rough idea of how much you should be feeding your baby, but what I got was conflicting information between the health visitor, a midwife and my GP.'

Study participant

What's next for the *Baby Milk* study?

We are working with Public Health England to improve the support for bottle-feeding parents. We will apply for funding to develop a web-based programme that will also include support for weaning onto solid foods. We will use the large amount of data collected to improve our understanding about infant feeding and growth.

Thank you

We would like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to everyone who helped make the *Baby Milk* study a success, including all our participants, GPs, midwives, health visitors and other NHS staff. We would also like to thank our funders, the National Prevention Research Initiative (Grant Reference MR/J000361/1).

Contact us

We would like to keep you updated with ongoing news and findings of the *Baby Milk* Study, so if you move or change your contact details please send us an email at

babymilkstudy@mrc-epid.cam.ac.uk

