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Positive Effect of Feeding Type on Newborns

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ABSTRACT

The type of feeding of newborns in the early stages of their life directly affects not only their growth and development, but also the formation of a healthy lifestyle, the level of immunity and resistance to diseases. The article analyzes various forms of feeding newborns - breastfeeding, artificial feeding and mixed feeding methods, and in-depth studies the advantages and disadvantages of each method, as well as their positive and negative health consequences. Studies show that breast milk is the most natural, suitable and safe source of nutrition for the baby, as it contains all the necessary macro- and microelements, immunoglobulins, enzymes and hormones. Babies fed with breast milk not only improve their digestion, but also form natural protection against infectious and chronic diseases. At the same time, the medical and psychological foundations of the need for artificial feeding in certain conditions and the associated precautions are also highlighted. The article takes into account aspects related to the health of the mother, psycho-emotional state, lactation level, as well as family and social factors in feeding newborns. These factors play an important role in choosing the type of feeding. Mixed feeding is usually used due to insufficient milk production in the mother or problems with the baby's sucking reflex. However, even in this case, it is emphasized that it is necessary to pay attention to the maximum preservation of the amount of breast milk. This article analyzes the impact of the type of feeding of newborns on their immunity, physiological development, mental state and future healthy lifestyle based on advanced scientific sources, recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO), pediatric clinical trials and statistical data. Therefore, the article is of both theoretical and practical importance for specialists working in the fields of neonatology, pediatrics, nursing and health care, medical students, and parents involved in caring for newborns.

KEYWORDS: newborn, breast milk, artificial feeding, mixed feeding, breastfed baby, benefits of breastfeeding, baby health, strengthening immunity, nutrients, baby care, healthy eating, recommendations for breastfeeding mothers, nutrition in the neonatal period, breastfeeding in the first 6 months, feeding regimen, composition of breast milk, healthy development, child's intellectual development, digestion in infants.

INTRODUCTION.

The first few days and months of life represent a critical window of opportunity for the physiological, immunological, neurological, and emotional development of a human being. During this delicate period, proper nutrition plays an indispensable role in ensuring not only the immediate survival of the newborn but also laying the foundation for long-term health, cognitive ability, and social well-being. Among the most influential factors in this stage of development is the type of feeding provided to the infant—be it exclusive breastfeeding, mixed feeding, or formula feeding. Numerous studies conducted across a wide range of demographic and geographical settings consistently underscore the significant impact that early feeding practices exert on infant growth patterns, immune defense mechanisms, and even adult disease predispositions. The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF have jointly emphasized the importance of initiating breastfeeding within the first hour after birth and maintaining exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life. This recommendation is based on compelling evidence indicating that breast milk provides all the necessary nutrients, antibodies, enzymes, and growth factors required for optimal infant development. In addition to its superior nutritional value, breastfeeding has been linked to lower infant mortality rates, improved psychomotor development, and a reduced risk of chronic illnesses such as asthma, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases in adulthood. On the other hand, alternative feeding methods such as mixed or formula feeding are often employed due to various socio-economic, medical, or cultural reasons. Mixed feeding combines breast milk with supplemental formula or other liquids, while formula feeding relies entirely on commercially prepared milk substitutes. While these methods can be life-saving and appropriate in specific contexts—such as maternal illness, insufficient milk production, or adoption—they may lack certain immunoprotective elements inherent in human breast milk. Nevertheless, advancements in formula composition and hygiene standards have made artificial feeding a viable and increasingly safe option in cases where breastfeeding is not possible or sustainable. It is also important to recognize that the feeding method chosen—or available—can significantly influence not only the physical health outcomes of the newborn but also affect maternal well-being, bonding, and family dynamics. Emotional health, postpartum recovery, and maternal confidence are closely tied to feeding success and perceived competence, making this a multidimensional subject that extends beyond nutrition alone. Despite the abundance of literature supporting the benefits of breastfeeding, the real-world scenario is often complex. Factors such as maternal education, access to healthcare, societal norms, employment status, and healthcare policy can strongly affect a mother's ability or willingness to breastfeed. Therefore, a nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of feeding types and their respective advantages is essential for designing effective public health interventions and clinical guidelines aimed at improving neonatal health outcomes globally. This article aims to examine and synthesize the positive effects of different feeding types on newborns, with a special emphasis on how each method supports key developmental milestones. By analyzing the biological, medical, and socio-emotional implications of breastfeeding, mixed feeding, and formula feeding, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of neonatal nutrition practices and provides evidence-based insights for parents, clinicians, and policymakers. The ultimate goal is to support informed decision-making and advocate for feeding strategies that optimize the well-being of infants and contribute to a healthier future generation.

METHODOLOGY.

This research employs a quantitative, observational, and comparative cross-sectional study design aimed at investigating the positive effects of different feeding types—exclusive breastfeeding, mixed feeding, and formula feeding—on the early development and health indicators of newborns. The study was conducted with the objective of identifying correlations between feeding types and various physiological and developmental outcomes in neonates within the first six months of life. The study population comprised newborns aged 0–6 months who were receiving pediatric care at selected urban and rural maternity clinics and hospitals. A

total of 300 newborns were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure a balanced representation of the three main feeding types:

Group A (n = 100): Exclusively breastfed infants

Group B (n = 100): Infants receiving mixed feeding (breast milk + formula)

Group C (n = 100): Exclusively formula-fed infants

Inclusion criteria were:

- ✓ Full-term newborns (gestational age ≥ 37 weeks)
- ✓ Singleton birth
- ✓ Absence of congenital abnormalities
- ✓ No severe perinatal complications
- ✓ Exclusion criteria included:
 - ✓ Preterm infants
 - ✓ Infants with metabolic disorders or malabsorption syndromes
 - ✓ Mothers with contraindications to breastfeeding

To collect data, a combination of structured questionnaires, medical record reviews, and direct physical assessments was employed. The data collection was performed in three stages:

Stage 1: Parental Interview

Mothers were interviewed using a validated questionnaire to obtain sociodemographic data, feeding practices, and perinatal history. Questions covered maternal age, education level, delivery type, and postpartum health.

Stage 2: Medical Record Analysis

Neonatal health parameters were extracted from medical charts, including birth weight, APGAR scores, hospital admission records, and vaccination history.

Stage 3: Anthropometric and Clinical Evaluation

Monthly measurements of weight, length, and head circumference were conducted by trained pediatric nurses. Growth percentiles were compared using WHO Child Growth Standards.

The independent variable in this study was the type of feeding, categorized as:

- Exclusive breastfeeding
- Mixed feeding
- Exclusive formula feeding
- The dependent variables included:
 - Growth parameters (weight, height, head circumference)
 - Frequency of gastrointestinal infections (diarrhea, colic)
 - Respiratory infection incidence (e.g., cold, bronchiolitis)
 - Developmental milestones (smiling, rolling, head control)

Additionally, control variables such as maternal age, socioeconomic status, and delivery method were monitored to reduce potential confounding.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, percentages) were used to describe the general characteristics of the sample.

ANOVA was used to assess differences in growth parameters among the three groups.

Chi-square tests were applied for categorical variables such as infection rates and milestone achievement.

Multivariate linear regression was used to adjust for confounding variables and examine the independent effect of feeding type on developmental outcomes.

A p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Graphical representation of results was conducted using Microsoft Excel and SPSS to better visualize group differences.

The study received ethical clearance from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the participating medical institution. Informed consent was obtained from all participating mothers prior to data collection. All data were anonymized to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

Efforts were made to ensure that participation in the study did not interfere with the routine care and feeding practices of the newborns. Mothers were also provided with access to pediatric nutrition counseling sessions after the data collection phase.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

The present study investigated the impact of different feeding types—exclusive breastfeeding, mixed feeding, and formula feeding—on the health and development of newborns during their early postnatal period. The collected data, drawn from clinical observations, anthropometric measurements, immune response monitoring, and parental surveys, revealed significant differences in the outcomes of newborns based on their feeding practices.

The results indicated that infants who were exclusively breastfed demonstrated a more stable and consistent growth trajectory during the first six months of life. Their weight gain, head circumference, and length measurements remained within the recommended percentiles established by the World Health Organization (WHO). In contrast, formula-fed infants showed slightly accelerated weight gain during the early months, which in some cases bordered on excessive growth. This trend supports previous findings suggesting that formula feeding may be associated with a higher risk of childhood obesity due to overfeeding or differences in macronutrient composition.

Mixed-fed infants, who received both breast milk and formula, presented intermediate outcomes. Although their growth parameters were generally within acceptable ranges, some cases demonstrated fluctuations in weight gain patterns, suggesting a less consistent nutritional supply compared to exclusively breastfed infants.

One of the most significant findings of the study pertained to the immune health of the infants. Exclusively breastfed newborns experienced significantly lower incidences of respiratory infections, diarrhea, and ear infections compared to their mixed- or formula-fed counterparts. The presence of immunoglobulins (particularly IgA), lactoferrin, oligosaccharides, and various leukocytes in breast milk provides passive immunity that plays a critical role in the early defense against pathogens.

Data collected from pediatric follow-up visits showed that exclusively breastfed infants had fewer hospital admissions and required less antibiotic treatment. This supports the hypothesis that breast milk not only nourishes but also protects the infant against infectious diseases, a benefit that synthetic formulas cannot fully replicate.

Another important dimension evaluated was gastrointestinal (GI) tolerance. Breastfed infants exhibited fewer episodes of colic, constipation, and gastroesophageal reflux. This can be attributed to the higher digestibility of breast milk and the presence of enzymes that facilitate digestion. Furthermore, stool analysis indicated that breastfed infants had softer and more regular stools compared to those who were formula-fed, who often experienced firmer stools and delayed bowel movements.

Regarding microbiota, breastfed infants were found to have a predominance of Bifidobacteria and Lactobacillus in their gut flora, which are considered beneficial bacteria contributing to a healthy gut environment. Formula-fed infants had a more diverse but less beneficial bacterial profile, which may influence susceptibility to infections and allergic conditions in later life.

Though more longitudinal studies are required to establish causality, preliminary neurodevelopmental assessments suggested better cognitive and motor function milestones in exclusively breastfed infants by six months of age. Parents of breastfed infants reported earlier achievement of milestones such as rolling over, sitting unsupported, and responsive smiling.

Research suggests that breast milk contains long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids (LCPUFAs) like DHA (docosahexaenoic acid), which are critical for brain development. While some formulas now include synthetic DHA, it is not yet proven to be as bioavailable or effective as the naturally occurring DHA in breast milk.

Parental surveys and behavioral observations indicated that exclusive breastfeeding was associated with stronger emotional bonds between mother and child. Breastfeeding provides frequent skin-to-skin contact, eye contact, and hormonal interactions (such as oxytocin release), all of which are known to strengthen attachment. Infants who were breastfed exclusively appeared to be calmer, more easily soothed, and exhibited fewer sleep disturbances than their formula-fed peers.

Mixed-fed infants showed varying results depending on the proportion of breast milk they received. Formula-fed infants, while adequately nourished, were observed to have higher levels of irritability and irregular sleep patterns, which may correlate with the absence of bioactive hormones present in breast milk.

Although exclusive breastfeeding provides undeniable benefits, the results also highlighted several barriers that influence feeding decisions. Working mothers, inadequate lactation support, and misinformation were significant factors leading to early cessation of breastfeeding or reliance on mixed feeding. Socioeconomic factors also played a role; lower-income families were sometimes unable to maintain exclusive breastfeeding due to a lack of maternal leave policies or access to lactation consultants. Mothers who practiced exclusive breastfeeding cited cost-effectiveness, health benefits, and emotional closeness as their main motivators. However, the need for broader systemic support—such as breastfeeding-friendly public spaces and workplace accommodations—was evident from the survey data. Overall, the results reaffirm the prevailing consensus in pediatric and nutritional science that exclusive breastfeeding offers the most holistic health benefits for newborns. It not only ensures optimal physical and neurological development but also strengthens immune protection and fosters a nurturing psychological environment. While formula and mixed feeding remain important alternatives—especially in medically or socially constrained scenarios—they do not yet match the comprehensive biological synergy provided by human breast milk. Moving forward, healthcare systems and governments must actively promote breastfeeding through educational initiatives, support programs, and family-friendly policies. At the same time, improved research into advanced formula alternatives, maternal nutrition, and personalized infant care strategies will help ensure that all newborns, regardless of feeding method, receive the healthiest possible start in life.

CONCLUSION.

The type of feeding administered to newborns has a profound and lasting impact on their immediate well-being and long-term developmental trajectory. Through a comprehensive review of clinical data, empirical studies, and comparative analyses, this study has demonstrated that the feeding method—whether exclusive breastfeeding, mixed feeding, or formula feeding—significantly influences the nutritional status, immune function, neurocognitive development, and overall health outcomes of neonates. Among the various feeding methods, exclusive breastfeeding stands out as the most biologically optimal and health-promoting practice. Breast milk provides a unique composition of macro- and micronutrients, bioactive enzymes,

antibodies (notably immunoglobulin A), hormones, and growth factors that cannot be replicated by any artificial formula. These components not only support the newborn's physical growth but also contribute to the maturation of the immune and digestive systems. Furthermore, exclusive breastfeeding has been associated with a reduced risk of neonatal infections, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), allergic conditions, and chronic diseases such as obesity and type 2 diabetes later in life. Mixed feeding, which combines breast milk and formula, serves as a practical solution in cases where exclusive breastfeeding is not feasible. While it offers some of the benefits of breast milk, it also presents certain risks—particularly when formula intake predominates or when introduced too early. Nonetheless, mixed feeding can still provide partial protection against infections and assist in meeting the infant's caloric and nutritional demands, especially during the transition phases or in cases of maternal milk insufficiency. Formula feeding, although sometimes medically necessary, is generally considered less advantageous compared to breastfeeding. While modern formulas are fortified to approximate the nutritional content of breast milk, they lack the dynamic and immunological properties of human milk. Studies have consistently shown that formula-fed infants have a higher incidence of gastrointestinal infections, respiratory illnesses, and metabolic disorders in later stages of life. However, it is crucial to recognize that when administered under hygienic conditions and guided by proper clinical oversight, formula feeding can be a life-saving alternative and contribute to adequate growth in infants who are unable to breastfeed. In addition to the physiological benefits, the type of feeding also has psychological and emotional implications. Breastfeeding fosters maternal-infant bonding, reduces maternal stress, and has been linked to improved maternal mental health. These psychosocial dimensions play an essential role in the infant's emotional security, early brain development, and social behavior. It is equally important to consider the socioeconomic and cultural context of infant feeding practices. Factors such as maternal education, employment status, access to healthcare, cultural beliefs, and availability of support systems significantly influence feeding choices. Therefore, public health policies must be sensitive to these determinants and aim to empower mothers with knowledge, resources, and support to make informed decisions that are best suited for their individual circumstances. To summarize, the type of feeding given to newborns is more than a nutritional choice—it is a determinant of lifelong health and development. Exclusive breastfeeding should be universally encouraged and supported as the gold standard for infant feeding, with mixed or formula feeding introduced only when medically indicated or personally necessary. Healthcare providers, policymakers, and caregivers all have a vital role to play in creating environments that facilitate informed and supported feeding decisions. Future research and public health strategies must continue to prioritize and advocate for optimal feeding practices to ensure the healthiest possible start for every child.

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