

## A Baby's Poor Diet Can Lower School-age IQ

Written by Editors

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A recent study gives parents another good reason to prepare and serve their babies healthy foods. While it's understood that the first two years of life are a "critical growth period for a baby's brain development, the development of a child's intelligence may be lowered by a poor diet," according to University of Adelaide researchers.

Their study looked into the data of a child's early eating habits at six months, 15 months, and two years of age. It then conducted a follow-up IQ test at the age of 8 that found there is a correlation between a child's diet and their IQ.

A standard IQ test is designed to measure a person's performance relative to their peers, most commonly, their age group.

"Diet supplies the nutrients needed for the development of brain tissues in the first two years of life and the aim of this study was to look at what impact diet would have on children's IQs," said Dr. Lisa Smithers, study author and researcher.

More than 7,000 children participated in the study, which compared a range of dietary patterns, including traditional and contemporary home-prepared food, ready-prepared baby foods, breastfeeding and 'discretionary' or junk foods.

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Researchers found babies who were breast-fed and ate nutritious foods during their first two years measured one to two points higher on IQ tests at age eight than did babies who may have been fed less nutritious foods, such as chips, sweets and soda.

“While the differences in IQ are not huge, this study provides some of the strongest evidence to date that dietary patterns from six to 24 months have a small but significant effect on IQ at eight years of age,” public health researcher Lisa Smithers said in a university news release. “It is important that we consider the longer-term impact of the foods we feed our children.”

While this study seems to reinforce what we already know—that our bodies and brains need healthy food to grow and develop—it offers some interesting notes about the impact of certain foods on babies' brain development, writes Julie Rasicot, author of the blog “The Early Years.”

“For example, babies who were breast-fed at six months and ate foods such as herbs, legumes, cheese, raw fruit and vegetables at 15 to 24 months exhibited a one- to two-point higher IQ at age eight. But while a diet of homemade meat, cooked vegetables and desserts at six months was positively associated with higher IQ scores, there was no association with similar patterns at 15 or 24 months.”

Dr. Smithers' team also found some negative impact on IQ from ready-prepared baby foods given at six months, but some positive associations when given at 24 months. “We found that children who were breastfed at six months and had a healthy diet regularly including foods such as legumes, cheese, fruit and vegetables at 15 and 24 months had an IQ up to two points higher by age eight.”

A Harvard study suggests that the IQ boosting power of a healthy diet begins before birth. Research published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that expectant moms who ate the most fish— more than three servings a week— were 30 percent more likely to have children with higher developmental scores at 18 months of age compared with those whose mothers ate less than a serving a week.

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The Harvard researchers also found that “babies who were breast-fed for 10 months or longer had higher developmental scores at 18 months. Those great fats found in fish also pass into breast milk. While baby formulas are now fortified with these fats, there may be other still-unrecognized substances in breast milk that help with babies' brain development.”

*Jayne Matthews-Hopson is a writer and academic advocate. Education Matters because “only the educated are free.” Your thoughts, comments and suggestions are welcomed at: <http://baltimoretimes-online.com>. □*