Factors in Infancy that Affect Obesity Risk

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Infancy is a critical time for developing healthy eating habits. It’s important to make sure that babies gain enough weight during their first year since their bodies and brains need calories and fat to develop well. However, scientists also now believe that gaining too much weight as a baby can be problematic. In fact, preliminary research suggests that overweight and obesity during infancy may be linked to obesity health problems later in life (Paul, Savage, Anzman, Beiler, Marini, Stokes, and Birch 2011).

What causes babies to become overweight? Previous research has shown that sleep and feeding practices may be key. In an effort to learn more, researchers in a recent study of about 150 families taught some but not all parents how to improve their babies’ sleep habits through swaddling, motion, and pacifier use, and how to avoid using food to soothe babies who weren’t hungry. Some parents also learned good practices about feeding solids, such as learning when to start solids, how to know when a baby is hungry or full, and how to encourage babies to accept healthy foods. Infants whose parents had been trained in both the soothing techniques and good feeding practices had healthier body weights at age one than babies whose parents had not been trained or had received only half of the training (Paul et al. 2011).

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Babies in their first year should be seen regularly by their pediatricians to make sure they are growing well. Their guidance can also help parents improve babies’ sleep and eating habits. It’s never too early to start developing mindful, health-conscious behaviors.

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