

ECOG 2011 Abstract Template

HabEat: understanding critical periods and critical factors of the formation and of the modification of food habits

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Introduction: Diets of young children in many European countries are not ideal (too many lipids; not enough fruit and vegetables). Early nutrition may have an impact on health in later life (diabetes, obesity, heart problems) and the first two years of life are of crucial importance in the acquisition of food habits. The HabEat project aims at understanding better of how food habits are formed and can be changed, in infants and children (< 5 years).

Methods: With 11 beneficiaries from 6 European countries, HabEat (2010-2013) is based on a multidisciplinary approach (epidemiology, nutrition, behavioural science, psychology and sensory science). On one hand, in order to identify critical periods and critical factors in the formation of food habits, the epidemiological approach is exploiting existing data from 4 cohorts (Eden, France; ALSPAC, UK; GenerationXXI, Portugal; EuroPrevall, Greece). On the other hand, the experimental approach is focusing on key learning mechanisms (in 6mo-3y children) and on new strategies for changing from poor to healthy habits (in 3-5y children).

Results: All workpackages of the HabEat project are on-going. This research will increase understanding of the critical periods when food habits and eating patterns form and to support effective intervention strategies for habit-breaking and behavioural change directed towards making healthier food choices.

Conclusion: By 2013, the results from HabEat should lead to recommendations in parental practices for feeding infants and children, of particular use to early childhood professionals, paediatricians and policy makers responsible for drafting feeding guidelines and also to the baby food industry.

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