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## Prevention of iron deficiency in breastfed infants

Health care professionals should not assume that breastfed or mixed-fed infants are consuming adequate amounts of iron according to a new analysis. The study published in a supplement to the October 2008 issue of *Pediatrics* analyzed data from the 2005-2007 Infant Feeding Practices Study II. The findings indicate that recommendations regarding iron intake among breastfed infants are not being followed by a substantial number of mothers in the United States.

Similar to Canadian infant feeding recommendations, the American Pediatric Association recommends that term breastfed infants be introduced to iron-rich foods by 6 months of age. In this study, at 7.5 months, almost half (47%) of the term infants consuming any breast milk received supplemental iron sources with inadequate frequency. Supplemental iron sources included iron-fortified infant cereal, meat, iron-fortified formula or an oral iron supplement. As many as 10.7% of all mothers in the study indicated that they had not yet introduced a complementary iron-rich food source by the time their infant was 7.5 months.

Other studies have demonstrated that iron deficiency, the most common nutritional deficiency, has negative effects on children's mental and motor development that may not be reversible.

### For your practice:

The Canadian *Nutrition for healthy term infants* guidelines recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life. Breastfeeding can continue for up to two years and beyond. Nutrient-rich, complementary foods should be introduced at 6 months to meet the infant's increasing nutritional requirements and developmental needs. Iron-containing foods such as iron-fortified infant cereals and meat should be introduced as the first foods in order to prevent iron deficiency.

### Want to learn more?

Read the study abstract, [\*Sources of supplemental iron among breastfed infants during the first year of life\*](#), by Dee DL et al. in *Pediatrics*. 2008; 122(Suppl 2):S98-104.

See [\*Iron and Infants\*](#), a resource for your practice.

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