Mothers’ experiences with complementary feeding

What do we know?
- Complementary feeding is defined as “The introduction of solid food to a baby”.
- Current recommendations suggest the introduction of solids at “around 6 months” and to progress from puree to family foods.
- There are two main approaches to complementary feeding:
  1. Traditional: spoon feeding pureed foods which progress in texture.
  2. Baby-led: infant self-feeds soft finger foods and is included in family meals.
- Some research suggests that a combination of these approaches may heighten nutritional adequacy.
- Mothers are the primary food providers and therefore it is essential to understand their experiences.

What did we find?

Four main themes emerged from the data.

**Theme 1: Infant Centred Complementary Feeding**

Mothers adopting the baby-led approach appeared to place more importance on this theme than mothers adopting a traditional approach.

- They discussed trusting the infant to choose appropriate foods from those offered at a time when they are ready.
- They also trusted the infants ability to deal with the food.

**Theme 2: Mother Centred Complementary Feeding**

All mothers discussed this theme, however mothers adopting a traditional approach appeared to make decisions based on this theme.

- Mothers discussed creating ease with complementary feeding by using equipment such as high chairs, trusting their maternal instincts and their perceived challenges of complementary feeding.

**Theme 3: Redefining the Baby-Led Approach**

Mothers adopting a baby-led approach appeared to rely heavily on their own research to empower themselves using sources such as ‘Google’ and ‘YouTube’.

**Theme 4: Research and Advice**

Mothers adopting a baby-led approach seemed to accept health professionals advice more readily.

What does it all mean?

This study confirms that:
- mothers who chose the baby led approach appear to be more infant centred, as per the definition of the approach;
- mothers are using aspects of the baby-led approach for practicality while other research suggests that a combined approach may heighten nutritional adequacy;
- mothers have similar concerns to health professionals in regards to the mess aspect of feeding, and tend to use facilitating objects for ease;
- mothers use various sources of information including the internet, thus it is important for health professionals to provide accurate information to mothers.

Where to from here?
- Results from this study may promote health professionals to reflect on their professional practice and consider providing information that is inclusive of mothers ideals and experiences. This tailored advice may resonate further with the mothers and assist in fostering healthy habits from infancy into childhood.
- Further research is needed in this field to investigate the long term nutritional and developmental effects of the baby-led approach.
- Quantitative studies could investigate redefining the baby-led approach, and exploring the accuracy of internet based sources.

Aims

1. To explore the various approaches to complementary feeding used by mothers.
2. To explore mothers experiences with complementary feeding.

Methods

**Step 1: Photo-voice:**
- Participants captured images around the theme of ‘my experience of introducing solid foods to my baby’.
- Content analysis of these photographs led to focus group categorisation into either baby-led or traditional groups.

**Step 2: Focus groups:**
- A total of 13 mothers attended the focus groups, six following a baby-led approach and seven following a traditional approach.
- The four focus group recordings were transcribed verbatim and analysed using an inductive process of interpretive thematic analysis.
- Traditional and baby-led transcripts were analysed separately and then compared.
- Triangulation was achieved through ongoing peer review.

References


At six months I decided just to start playing around with different foods and stuff. We did baby-led weaning. Well kind of – my take on it (participant 5, baby-led)

...the biggest fear was choking...so I googled it and I watched quite a few videos. So then I felt empowered. I felt like I could manage (participant 5, baby-led)