

Whole Cow's Milk in Early Life

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Abstract

Cow's milk is a major food for young children. Whole cow's milk is known to be detrimental to infants, mainly due to its low iron content. The negative association with iron status led to recommending the introduction of formula feeding in infancy during the weaning period or when breastfeeding ceased. More recently, the literature suggests that consuming whole cow's milk in infancy has unfortunate effects on growth, especially weight acceleration and development of overweight in childhood. These issues are discussed in the following chapter. Other suggested reasons for the avoidance of whole cow's milk in infancy are touched upon, such as milk protein allergy and high renal solute load. The hypothesis about early cow's milk introduction in the pathology of certain diseases, mainly through the peptide β -casomorphin-7, is briefly reviewed, showing that there is no clear evidence for the suggested associations. The chapter gives a recent example of introducing formula at 6 months of age instead of whole cow's milk in infants' diet in Iceland. Several aspects of consuming whole cow's milk in infancy can be found in recent reviews.

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Cow's Milk in Infancy and Iron Deficiency

One of the most negative aspects of cow's milk consumption in infancy is its association with diminished iron stores and increased probability of iron deficiency (ID). Iron has many important roles in the human body, and its deficiency can have a great impact. Among other things, iron plays a part in oxygen distribution, the body's immune system and brain functions. ID in its most severe form presents as ID anemia (IDA). Chronic IDA in infancy can lead to long-term effects lasting into adolescence and adulthood [1]. Intervention early in life is therefore vital. This is especially important after the first months of life, to prevent worsening of iron status after the depletion

