

FEEDING PATTERNS AND GROWTH OF VIETNAMESE INFANTS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

B. REYNOLDS*, N.E. HITCHCOCK** and J. COVENEY*

Traditional Vietnamese patterns of feeding and caring for infants differ in many respects from those common in Australia (Mathews and Manderson 1980). Migration to Australia has resulted in some modification of those practices (Mathews and Manderson 1980). The aims of this study were to describe feeding patterns of infants born in Perth of Vietnamese migrant parents, and to document the growth of these infants, prospectively, from their birth to 12 months.

Forty-six mothers and infants (23 boys, 23 girls) took part in the study in 1980/81. Half of the infants were born within 8 months of the mothers arrival in Australia. Eighty one per cent of mothers initiated breastfeeding; 43% continued to breastfeed at 6 months, and 23% at 12 months. Breast feeding in this group compares very favourably with that in West Australian mothers (Hitchcock et al. 1982) and contrasts markedly with the low incidence reported among Vietnamese mothers in Sydney (Mathews and Manderson 1980). Low solute formula was used for infants not being breast fed; cow's milk became common only after 9 months. Seventy per cent of infants received orange juice by 2 months of age, 81% by 6 months. Solids were generally introduced between 4 and 6 months and to all children by 8 months.

Median weights and lengths approximated the 10th centile of international (NCHS 1976) reference values at birth, the 50th centile at 3 months. From that age, growth rates decreased so that by 12 months, median weights approximated the 25th centile (NCHS) and median lengths lay between the 25th and the 50th centiles (NCHS). The low energy density of weaning foods may have been a factor contributing to this decrease.

HITCHCOCK, N.E., MC GUINNESS, D. and GRACEY, M. (1982). Med. J. Aust. 1:372.

MATHEWS, M., MANDERSON, L. (1980). Aust. paediatr. J. 16:263.

NCHS: NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS (1976). NCHS Growth Curves for Children. Vital and Health Statistics, Series II, Number 165.

(U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare).

* Nutrition and Dietetic Section, Health Department of Western Australia, Perth, Western Australia, 6000.

** Princess Margaret Children's Medical Research Foundation, Perth, Western Australia, 6001.