**Toddler diet warning: 99.9 per cent of under twos get too much protein as parents overfeed them milk**

* **Toddlers risk high blood pressure, heart disease and Type 2 diabetes**
* **A study found two-thirds of two year olds consume too many calories**
* **Experts warned children were eating nearly three times what they should**
* **Health officials claim toddlers should only consume 968 calories per day**

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Parents are fuelling Britain’s obesity crisis by giving their toddlers too much milk, experts have warned.

A staggering 99.9 per cent of children under two consume an excess of protein each day, according to the biggest ever study of toddlers’ diets, with the average child eating nearly three times what they should.

And at 21 months old, two-thirds are taking in more calories than the recommended daily limit – putting them at risk of high blood pressure, heart disease and Type 2 diabetes in later life.

Scientists warned that the diet of young children is instrumental in deciding their future health, with obese

Once children are weaned on to solids they should not drink too much cow’s milk or formula. But the team found that at 21 months, the average British toddler was getting a quarter of its calories from cow’s milk. The NHS advises they should not get more than 600ml – a little over a pint – a day.

Lead author Hayley Syrad, of UCL’s Health Behaviour Research Centre, said children’s diets are a ‘cause for concern’, adding: ‘Dietary preferences and habits are established during the first two years of life and what we eat in early life can have an enduring impact on our health.’

The study, published in the British Journal of Nutrition, looked at data for 2,336 children. It found that average daily calorie intake ‘significantly exceeded’ the recommended 968 limit, with 63 per cent of children consuming too many at an average of 1,035.

At 40g a day, protein intake was nearly three times higher than the recommended 15g, while fibre intake was 8g – half that recommended.

Last night Dr Louis Levy, head of nutrition science at Public Health England, said: ‘Obese children are much more likely to become obese adults who are prone to serious illnesses like Type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

‘We all need to help toddlers get into good eating and drinking habits... including five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, oily fish and starchy foods while limiting sugary, salty and fatty foods and drinks.’

He added that children aged six months to five years should take daily vitamin supplements.

Izzi Seccombe of the Local Government Association, which is responsible for public health for young children, said: ‘Obesity can begin at birth, with increasing evidence that what happens during the first 1,000 days of a child’s life can have a big impact on how... they grow up and into adulthood. Intervention at a young age is vital.’

Breast milk is highly recommended for babies for at least their first six months, and for longer if possible – but once they start eating solids experts say that milk consumption, including cow’s milk and formula, should be reduced.

Miss Syrad, of UCL’s Health Behaviour Research Centre, said: ‘Parents do want to give their children the best diet but they don’t get support and guidance on what they should be giving their children at this age.

‘We would say that at this age children can be moved away from milk and moved on to solid food and water.’

Dr Anne Mullen, director of nutrition at The Dairy Council, said: ‘Evidence pooled from a large number of studies has shown that there is no link between dairy intake and obesity during early or middle childhood.

‘Furthermore, studies have shown that in some cases higher milk consumption can actually decrease the chance of developing obesity among young children, older children and adolescents. Research also indicates a protective effect of dairy from obesity in the adult diet.

‘Blaming milk and dairy for childhood and lifelong obesity is nonsensical. Excess calories come from a multitude of sources and, importantly, physical activity moderates body weight and fat accumulation.’

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3525490/Toddler-diet-warning-99-9-cent-twos-protein-parents-overfeed-milk.html#ixzz4Bkf5PzKt>   
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