



New World Health Organisation Growth Charts adopted for UK use

The Breastfeeding Network welcomes the announcement that the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition and the Royal College of Pediatrics and Child Health have recommended that the new World Health Organisation growth charts, based on the growth of breastfed babies, be adopted for use in the United Kingdom from two weeks to 24 months.

See <http://www.sacn.gov.uk/index.html>

The new charts, released in 2006, represent 16 years' international investment. They show the biologically normal growth pattern of babies.

http://www.who.int/childgrowth/standards/weight_for_age/en/index.html

Babies included in data collection were born to women who intended to breastfeed exclusively (with no supplemental milks or foods) for at least four months and into families where neither parent smoked. Their growth pattern thus represents how babies **ought** to grow. Importantly this growth pattern is different than that of babies who are fed infant formula milks from birth: breastfed babies grow more quickly in the first few months and then their growth slows. The charts show the growth of babies exclusively breastfed, as the UK Department of Health recommends.

If breastfed babies' weights are plotted on a conventional growth chart, unnecessary concern may be triggered by the appearance of growth faltering in the second half of the first year. The new chart, based on the breastfed growth pattern, should help to reassure parents of such healthy, breastfed babies that they are growing normally. However, in the first four months, the centiles on the WHO chart are *above* those on the current UK chart. It is therefore important that young babies who seem not to be gaining well should have a skilled feeding assessment and their mothers should receive breastfeeding help and support.

The introduction of the new chart provides an opportunity to re-examine routine weighing practice in the UK. BfN is particularly encouraged that the Department of Health is intending to pilot the use of the chart. This may help shape the proposed training for health professionals and ultimately ensure that the chart supports parents in feeling confident about their child's growth and about breastfeeding.

The Breastfeeding Network has noted that current weighing practice in the UK appears to focus simply on weight gain. In an era of increasing child obesity, with its life-long health consequences, the vital message of the new growth standard is that 'optimum growth is not necessarily maximum growth'.

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