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Editorial

Maternal Obesity: A Major Barrier to Breastfeeding

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Introduction

In recent years, a high obesity rate has been observed among women. The World Health Organization estimates that 14% of women in the world are obese and 35% overweight [1]. The increase in the body weight of this population is strongly associated with the reproductive cycle, considering that the prevalence of obesity among women is higher after the first parturition and tends to increase according to the number of pregnancies [2].

It is believed that maternal nutritional status may interfere with the prevalence and duration of breastfeeding, since pre-gestational weight, gestational weight gain and postpartum Body Mass Index (BMI), when above recommended range, may favor early termination of breastfeeding [3].

Discussion

The obesity during the reproductive cycle is related to the reduction of the prolactin response to the baby suction, and also to the late production of breast milk, often leading to the early supply of infant formulas. In addition, obese women have greater difficulty in correctly positioning the newborn to breastfeed, which impairs the initiation of breastfeeding [4,5].

Studies have found a direct relationship between maternal BMI and early weaning. Women with BMI above recommendation present higher difficulty to initiate breastfeeding and breastfeed their infants less frequently than those with adequate BMI [6]. In addition, obese women have a later onset of milk secretion, and express less self-confidence regarding the practice of breastfeeding [4].

Moreover, authors suggest that overweight has strong influences on a woman's self-confidence, contributing to the difficulty in maintaining breastfeeding. Thereby, obese women need to be more encouraged to initiate breastfeeding and maintain it during the recommended period of time [5,7].

Conclusion

Maternal health and nutritional status is directly related to lactation and the success of breastfeeding, but nutritional attention in this cycle of life is still neglected. More studies are needed to improve maternal health care, avoid excessive weight gain during pregnancy, postpartum weight retention, and prevent early weaning.

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