

# Study shows that feeding fussy babies to settle them down may lead to weight gain as they get older

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Studies have shown that fussy babies—ones who cry often and are more easily distressed—tend to gain more weight and have a higher risk for obesity in childhood. One theory, says Stephanie Anzman-Frasca, a research associate at the Friedman School, is that caregivers of a fussy child are more likely to try feeding him whenever he cries, and that doing so reinforces the idea for the child that he gets to eat when he's upset.

"It could have repercussions down the lifespan," she says. (If you've ever reached for a pint of ice cream when you were unhappy, you know what she means.)

Anzman-Frasca looked into ways to curb this feeding tendency in a study led by Leann Birch and Ian Paul at Penn State University. For the study, mothers of newborns were given instruction about how to tell whether their infants were hungry or fussy for other reasons. They also learned about other ways to soothe their babies (swaddling and pacifiers, for example) and how and when to introduce healthy solid foods (such as puréed green beans and squash) to even reluctant infants.

At the end of the yearlong study, infants of mothers who received the instruction had a lower weight-to-length ratio than [babies](#) in the control group.

More than a quarter of preschool-age children are overweight or obese, so researchers are looking more closely at whether early infancy interventions such as these could prevent [obesity](#) later in life. Babies, after all, learn so much in their first year of life that picking up [healthy eating habits](#) could fit right in.

Provided by Tufts University

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