

## ***Child Growth Rises to the Top of the Agenda for Infant and Toddler Forum***

The importance of monitoring the growth of young children has never been more acute. The prevalence of childhood obesity and the government's commitment to halt its rising levels by 2010 has thrust health and childcare professions into the frontline of the battle to halt this epidemic. Equally, it is important to identify the early signs of poor nutrition and inadequate growth.

There remains debate regarding the benefits of routinely measuring growth, the ages when measurements should be made or recorded and thresholds for action. In addition healthcare professionals acknowledge that measuring, plotting and interpreting results is not simple and training is limited.

The current lack of guidance has created inconsistencies in the way that childhood growth monitoring is undertaken, revealing a patchwork of practice across the UK and a call for national protocols.

The Infant & Toddler Forum's 2007 educational programme will focus specifically on the needs of health visitors and community practitioners, who play a critical role in monitoring child growth and are the first-in-line contact for parents. This programme is supported by an educational grant from Nutricia Ltd. Explaining the Forum's commitment to address this complex of issues, Chair Lawrence Weaver commented:

"Young children, and in particular babies and toddlers, grow and develop at a rapid rate, and measuring their growth regularly and consistently can help highlight any problems early on, when it is easier to address them. There needs to be guidance on the most effective way to measure and assess growth, when and why.

Our educational initiatives this year aim to provide a combination of practical skills on measuring and assessing, and an understanding of the issues that underpin growth; what is considered 'normal' in the UK today; and what requires intervention. This will help give healthcare professionals at the front line the knowledge, skills and confidence to observe, measure, and plot growth accurately and, to know when to reassure parents or when to take further action", concludes Prof Weaver.

Practising health visitor and forum member Carolyn Taylor believes that this year's educational programme meets an urgent need among health visitors for information on monitoring child growth.

"Practitioners themselves have identified a lack of support materials and information in this area, so this initiative has been very well received," she said. "It offers useful, practical guidance that will help health visitors increase their knowledge and improve their practice."

## ***Forum Activity in 2007***

### **Website and interactive learning tools**

The Forum has its own dedicated website [www.infantandtoddlerforum.org](http://www.infantandtoddlerforum.org) which is a great source of information for healthcare professionals. Healthcare professionals can download Factsheets containing evidence-based information and best-practice guidance on the whole area of toddler nutrition and feeding.

### **'Growth Measurement & Assessment Tool' – A new interactive resource**

The Forum are gearing up to launch a new and dynamic 'Growth Tool', designed to improve the way in which healthcare professionals measure and assess early years growth. Developed as a web-based resource, this initiative combines interactive components with a video showing growth measurement in practice. The Growth Tool will be downloadable from the Forum website from September 2007, and plans are underway to link it to CPD programmes of various professional bodies.

### **Factsheets**

Three new Factsheets have just been launched, extending this most valuable bank of resources for healthcare professionals. These include:

- Common Nutritional Problems in Toddlers
- An Introduction to Food Hypersensitivity
- How to Manage Food Hypersensitivity

Further Factsheets are also planned for 2007/08, reflecting the issues raised at this year's study day programme, providing a complementary 'package' of resources incorporating the themes of: Iron Deficiency; Constipation; Obesity; and Growth.

### **Study Days 2007 - 'A Growing Issue – understanding and promoting healthy growth and development in toddlers'**

Building on the success of its 2006 Study Day Programme, The Forum will be running three study days in 2007, in London (27 September), Birmingham (28 November) and Leeds (13 December). The agenda focuses on some of the key issues in growth management such as:

- What should we measure and when?
- How do we recognise normal growth and failure to thrive?
- What constitutes a 'balanced diet'?

For more information about Study Days including registration details, healthcare professionals can visit the website at [www.infantandtoddlerforum.org](http://www.infantandtoddlerforum.org) or call the Study Day hotline on 0800 781 7194.

For more information on the Infant & Toddler Forum and its educational initiatives please visit our website at [www.infantandtoddlerforum.org](http://www.infantandtoddlerforum.org).

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### **For further press information please contact the Forum Secretariat**

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#### **Notes to Editors:**

- Members of the Forum include Professor Lawrence Weaver (Chair), Consultant Paediatrician; Dr Robert Coombs, Consultant Neonatologist; Dr Gill Harris, Consultant Paediatric Clinical Psychologist; Judy More, Paediatric Dietitian; Dr Atul Singhal, Deputy Director, MRC Childhood Nutrition Research Centre; Carolyn Taylor, Specialist Practice Teacher Health Visiting, PCT PEC/Board Nurse; Carina Venter, Senior Dietitian
- A goal of the Forum is to improve the access of healthcare professionals to reliable, evidence-based nutritional information relevant to their practice, which will equip them to advise and support the parents of infants and young children.
- The Forum is supported by an educational grant from the Infant Nutrition division of Nutricia. The views and outputs of the group, however, remain independent of Nutricia and its commercial interests