

MATERNAL DIETARY HABITS AND FOOD RESTRICTIONS DURING BREASTFEEDING

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INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Appropriate dietary intake during post-partum is of particular importance since it strongly determines the health status of mother and infant. However, cultural tradition has an important effect on lactation behavior where many cultures have some proscriptions during lactation. Popular myths about maternal diet during breastfeeding can become barriers to breastfeeding and lead to unnecessary dietary restrictions. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is a common opinion that lactating women should not eat citrus, legumes and should increase fluid intake, especially sweet juices as they could increase breast milk production. If the mother has healthy eating habits, there is usually no reason to change them during breastfeeding. Although there are some nutritional guidelines for breastfeeding women, an evidence-based recommendation about food restriction during this period is still limited (1). So, the aim of this study was to examine dietary habits of women during breastfeeding, self-food restrictions as also increased consumption of some food.



PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

This study enrolled 148 voluntary breastfeeding mothers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, aged from 22 to 45 years (31,0 ± 4,1). The survey included mothers who had babies 1 week to 6 months old. The data were obtained through a specially designed anonymous online questionnaire composed of 35 questions including items such as maternal age, educational attainment, number of children, body height, body weight before gestation and in the time of completing the survey, and questions about their food intake and presence of some conditions and complications during pregnancy (GDM, preeclampsia). The online survey format was easily accessible, time-saving for new mothers, and cost-effective.

The obtained data were compiled using the Google Forms platform and analyzed using IBM SPSS for Windows, version 25 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Chi-squared test, t-test.

RESULTS

The weight of breastfeeding women at the time of completing the survey was higher for 3,48 (95% CI, 2,70 to 4,26) kg compared to their weight at the time of conception [t(147)=8,806 p<0,001]. According to the BMI category, 12,2% of women were in pre-obesity and 4,7% in the obesity category before conception, compared to (24,3% and 6,1% respectively) to the time after the birth of a child. According to American Dietetic Association, pregnant women are considered to be at high risk if they have obesity, diabetes, or personal history of GDM or gestational hypertension (2). According to results from our study, 13,5% of women had some condition (GDM or preeclampsia) or other undefined complication during pregnancy. The average weight gain for mothers in this study was 13,7±6,1. During breastfeeding, 35,8% of them was taking some supplement (iron supplements, folate, vitamin D). Of all participating women 5,4% (n=8) were on some dietetic regimen, of which 6 are on a self-determined diet while for one, the diet was determined by a fitness trainer and for one by a specialist. Only 28,4% (n=42) doesn't avoid specific food or food group, while others (71,6%, n=106) avoided one or more types of food during breastfeeding. Commonly restricted food were citrus fruits, vegetables from the Brassicaceae family, legumes, garlic, onion, and dairy products (**Graph 1**). Water, cumin and fennel tea, fenugreek tea, chicken or baby beef soup, cow milk, chocolate, fruit compote, sweet juices, and non-alcohol beer were most commonly increased food by 25,7% of lactating women. Statistically, a significant difference was not determined between higher consumption of some food groups and BMI, nor between the level of educational attainment and food restriction. The present study also examined the frequency at which particular food groups were consumed at the time of completing the survey (**Table 1**).

CONCLUSION

Nursing mothers should be educated on proper diet practices while being warned about unscientific approaches to diet restriction, as also dietetic regimens by non-professionals. Generally, women do not need to limit or avoid specific foods while breastfeeding, except alcohol and raw meat and sea products. Mothers should be encouraged to eat a healthy and diverse diet, which will help mothers return to a healthy weight, prevent problems in subsequent pregnancies, and reduce the risk of chronic diseases later in life.

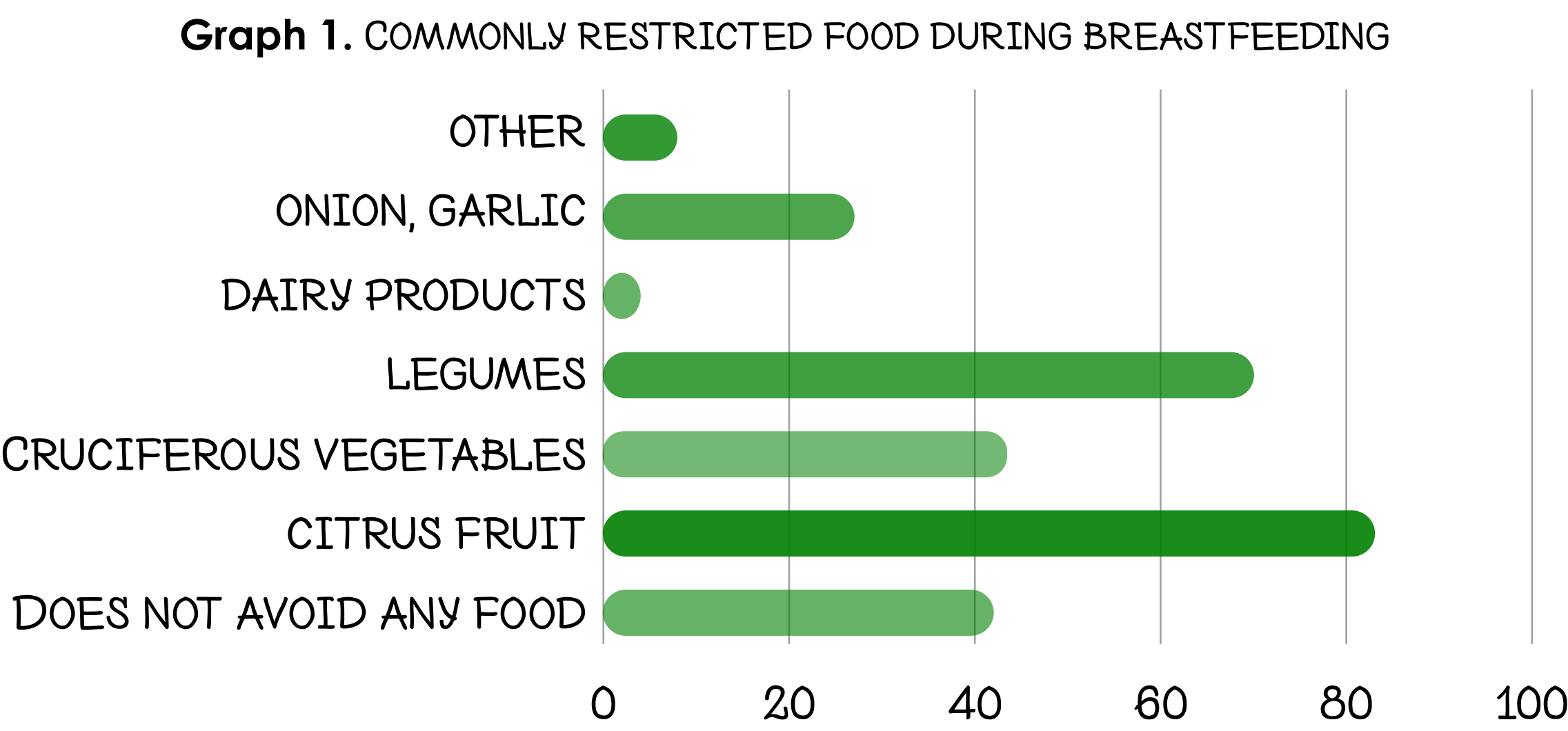


Table 1. FREQUENCY OF CONSUMPTION OF DIFFERENT FOOD GROUPS

	2 AND MORE / DAY	1 / DAY	3-4 / WEEK	1-2 / WEEK	1-2 / MONTH	NEVER
	MEAL FREQUENCY % (n)					
VEGETABLE	12,2 (18)	48,6 (72)	27,7 (41)	10,8 (16)	0,71 (1)	-
FRUIT	23 (24)	39,9 (59)	16,9 (25)	17,6 (26)	1,4 (2)	1,4 (2)
LEGUMES	-	-	-	43,2 (64)	38,5 (57)	18,2 (27)
MILK & DAIRY PRODUCTS	-	72,3 (107)	16,2 (24)	6,1 (9)	2,7 (4)	2,7 (4)
RED MEAT	-	13,5 (20)	48,0 (71)	35,1 (52)	2,0 (3)	1,4 (2)
POULTRY	-	2,7 (4)	31,1 (46)	58,8 (87)	6,8 (10)	0,7 (1)
FISH	-	-	0,7 (1)	30,4 (45)	56,1 (83)	12,8 (19)
WHOLE CEREALS	-	23,0 (34)	17,6 (26)	21,6 (32)	18,2 (27)	19,6 (29)
EGGS	-	13,5 (20)	34,5 (51)	40,5 (60)	7,4 (11)	4,1 (6)

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