Reflective questions:

• Did you know that new scientific evidence suggests that environmental factors that have an impact during early life can influence an individual’s lifelong future health?

• Are you aware of the importance of nutrition in the first 1,000 days of an infant's life?

There has been a rise in non-communicable disease such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer in recent decades. Now, scientific evidence suggests that environmental factors that have an impact during early life – from conception through to the toddler years – can influence a person's response to later exposures and thus affect their health and disease risk later in life\(^1,2\).

The first 1,000 days

During the first 1,000 days of an infant’s life – from conception until they are two years old - their organs and body systems are rapidly growing and are still very flexible and responsive to nutritional influences\(^3\). These 1,000 days represent a unique window of opportunity for determining an infant's lifelong future health\(^4,5\).

As a healthcare professional, you are in an ideal position to raise awareness of how nutrition and other lifestyle factors can positively influence a child’s health outcomes.

According to Nutricia Early Life Nutrition, manufacturer of the Aptamil range, helping mums-to-be and babies get the right nutrition during the four ‘windows of opportunity’ – pregnancy, breastfeeding, infant feeding and toddler feeding – can positively influence short- and long-term health outcomes.

**OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

\(^{†}\) For healthcare professional use only
Parent consultation

Mrs Patel has a 6-month-old son, who she has been breastfeeding until now. She tells you that she is very conscious of the importance of nutrition for herself and her family and that she would like to start giving her son formula milk. She would like to discuss the different milks that are available and general nutrition in infants.

Questions to ask

• Has Mrs Patel tried giving her baby any formula milks so far?
• Is she planning on replacing all of his feeds with formula, or will she continue with breastfeeding for some feeds (e.g. at night)?
• Is the baby being weaned yet?

Educate

As you discuss the options with Mrs Patel, you could explain the importance of nutrition – especially in the first 1,000 days of an infant’s life – and how this may affect her son’s lifelong future health. It is well documented that nutrition is a major influencer of health in later life. In fact, there are two expert reports that recognise the potential role of early life nutrition in the prevention of chronic disease.

Major health influencers

It is now believed that lifelong health is predominantly determined by environmental influences such as:

• Nutrition – dietary habits, nutrient intake, taste exposure
• Lifestyle – sleep, physical exercise, smoking
• Disease – infection, obesity
• Others – e.g. pollution.

Some experts believe that at most, 20 per cent of a baby’s future health is determined by their genes.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

With your help and advice on correct nutrition, parents and prospective parents can be made aware of how to give their infants the best possible start in life.

Remember to use the four windows of opportunity – pregnancy, breastfeeding, infant feeding and toddler feeding – to make a difference to the early nutrition and lifelong health of future generations.

References:

5. 1,000 Days: Why 1,000 days? Available at: www.thousanddays.org [Last accessed October 2014].

Further reading:

www.nct.org.uk/about-nct/first-1000-days
www.aptaclub.co.uk