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Healthy Bacteria in Babies

By DOUGLAS QUENQUA
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Infants may fail to develop a healthy mixture of intestinal bacteria if they are delivered by [Caesarean section](#) or do not drink [breast milk](#), researchers are reporting.

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Previous studies have linked the presence of certain gut microbes to healthy digestion, bowel regulation and stimulation of the immune system. When those microbes are missing or disrupted, people are more likely to suffer ailments like [inflammatory bowel disease](#), [asthma](#), [cancer](#) and [allergies](#).

Seeking to understand how the microbes are developed in early life, a team of Canadian researchers collected samples (dirty diapers, frozen) from newborns at birth and again at 3 months. They found that many children who were delivered by C-section all but lacked a group of critical bacteria found in those who were delivered vaginally. The gut bacteria in children who were fed only formula, rather than breast milk, was also significantly different from those who were given at least some breast milk.

[The results](#) were published in CMAJ, the journal of the Canadian Medical Association.

The presence of gut microbes “serves a very important function during infancy” by “telling the immune cells not to overreact to certain bacteria but to react to others,” said an author of the study, Anita L. Kozyrskyj, an associate professor at the University of Alberta. When those microbes are not present, the immune system is more likely to overreact to something benign, like food or dust.

“We think this is a pathway to the development of conditions like allergies and asthma,” Dr. Kozyrskyj said, particularly with the rise in children delivered by Caesarean section.

The research was conducted as part of the Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal Development study (Child for short), which is looking at more than 10,000 people,

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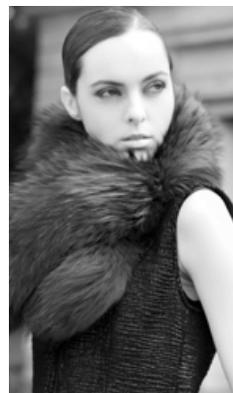
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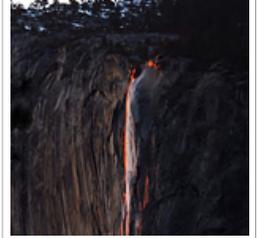
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