COMPLEMENTARY FEEDING USING ADULT FOOD AND DEVELOPMENT OF TASTE TOWARD THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET

SUMMARY
Taste development may be influenced by early exposure to natural flavours. Preference for tastes of the Mediterranean Diet (MD) may be kept over the years if these foods are early used in the complementary feeding. Objective of the present study is to verify the term effect of using breast fed or formula fed infants using adult foods typical of the MD.

The authors do not have any conflict of interest.

METHODS
A randomized controlled trial was carried out by 18 general paediatricians affiliated to the Italian Federation of Paediatricians (FIMP) of Naples. Exclusive breast fed or formula fed infants were weaned between 4 and 6 months of age, accordingly to the current guidelines. The weaning scheme was characterized either by industrial foods commonly used at weaning (controls) or by natural and seasonal foods as suggested by the MD (cases). Moreover, an adequate presence of fish, legumes, green vegetables, spices and aromatic herbs are early offered to children of the case group. Verbal reinforcement was carried out only in cases families at any visit in the paediatrician office to focus the mother attention on quality and quantity of food the kid is assuming and stressing the preventive role of MD to chronic-degenerative diseases. All mothers receive a questionnaire (N.1) before the weaning (T0) and at 36 months of age of the kid (T36) to monitor eating family habits variations. Growing rates of children were regularly registered by the paediatrician. The explaining manual “MD in the first year of life” (Figure 1) is freely given to all cases’ mothers. Data about MD adherence were collected by using questionnaires both for adult and for children (kidmed score, questionnaire 2).

PRELIMINARY RESULTS: .325 children (163 cases and 162 controls) have been enrolled. The two groups are perfectly homogeneous, as shown in Figure 2. Preliminary results show a statistically significant association between mothers degree and their adherence to the MD (Figure 3). In contrast, no correlation was observed between mothers adherence to MD and birth weight of children (Figure 4). Interesting data come out from the analysis of mothers eating habits (Figure 5): about 100% of mothers regularly assume olive oil; in contrast more than 50% of mothers eat fish more than once a week. More than 80% of mothers do not regularly consume dried fruits and more than 50% regularly use commercial sweetened products. At 12 months of age, the kidmed score of the case group showed that 73.4% had a value between 8 and 12 (good adherence); 23.9% between 4 and 7 (bad adherence); 11.7% between 1 and 3 (very bad adherence) (Figure 6). Answers to the kidmed questionnaires at 12 months are shown in figure 7. Finally, kids eating family’s foods and sitting with the rest of the family in the case group where significantly higher than those in the control group (Figure 8).

CONCLUSION. The weaning time is a critical moment to have effects on children and familial eating habits. MD at weaning seems to be useful to have healthy habits at 12 months of age. In the next two years we will compare the control group to the case group and will analyze how useful are natural foods when early introduced with complementary feeding in comparison to a traditional weaning, in order to verify long term eating habits and health outcome.