J Food Process Technol 2017, 8:1(Suppl)
http://dx.doi.org/10.4172/2157-7110.C1.060

The consequences of dietary virgin coconut oil on infant development

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Statement of Problem: Coconut oil is commonly used as herbal medicine worldwide. There is limited information regarding its effects on the developing embryo and infant growth. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of coconut oil on infant growth.

Methods: Standard diet and olive oil diet were used as controls. Pups' weights gained/lost over time were documented. Profile of standard diet and coconut oil diet were analyzed by Gas Chromatography Flame Ionization Detector (GCFID).

Findings: Mean of the total weight gained/ lost over six weeks of time revealed that within the first three weeks, pups whose mothers were fed coconut oil and olive oil have a significantly lower birth weight than that of standard diet pups. At six weeks of age, only coconut oil fed pups exhibited significantly lower birth weight.

Conclusion & Significance: We report that coconut oil modifies fatty acids profile of standard diet by inducing high level of medium chain fatty acids with low level of essential fatty acids. Pups borne by dams fed with coconut oil developed spiky fur. Our study has demonstrated that coconut oil has a direct effect on infant growth and health via maternal intake; we suggest the use of coconut oil as herbal medicine to be treated with caution.

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