Evidence-Based Research in Pediatric Nutrition
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Volume Editors

Hania Szajewska  Warsaw
Raanan Shamir  Petach-Tikva

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List of Contributors

Carlo Agostoni
Pediatric Clinic 2
Department of Clinical Sciences
and Community Health
University of Milan
Fondazione IRCCS Cà Granda-Ospedale
Maggiore Policlinico
Via della Commenda, 9
IT-20122 Milan (Italy)

Gloria Bueno
GENUD (Growth, Exercise, NUtrition and
Development) Research Group
Department of Paediatrics
Faculty of Medicine
University of Zaragoza, Zaragoza (Spain)
C/Domingo Miral s/n
ES-50.009 Zaragoza (Spain)

Anna Chmielewska
Department of Paediatrics
The Medical University of Warsaw
Dzialdowska 1
PL-01-184 Warsaw (Poland)

Pilar De Miguel-Etayo
GENUD (Growth, Exercise, NUtrition and
Development) Research Group
Department of Physiatry and Nursing
Faculty of Health Sciences
Department of Paediatrics
Faculty of Medicine
University of Zaragoza, Zaragoza (Spain)
C/Domingo Miral s/n
ES-50.009 Zaragoza (Spain)

Jesús M. Garagorri
GENUD (Growth, Exercise, NUtrition and
Development) Research Group
Department of Paediatrics
Faculty of Medicine
University of Zaragoza, Zaragoza (Spain)
C/Domingo Miral s/n
ES-50.009 Zaragoza (Spain)

Dariusz Gruszfeld
Neonatal Intensive Care Unit
Children's Memorial Health Institute in Warsaw
Al. Dzieci Polskich 20
PL-04-730 Warsaw (Poland)

Andrea Horvath
Department of Paediatrics
The Medical University of Warsaw
Dzialdowska 1
PL-01-184 Warsaw (Poland)

Sanja Kolaček
University Department of Paediatrics
Referral Center for Paed. Gastro & Nutrition
Children’s Hospital Zagreb
Klaiceva 16
HR-10000 Zagreb (Croatia)

Berthold V. Koletzko
Division of Metabolic and Nutritional Medicine
Dr von Hauner Children's Hospital
University of Munich Medical Centre
Lindwurm Strasse 4
DE-80337 Munich (Germany)

Ronit Lubetzky
Department of Pediatrics
Tel Aviv-Sourasky Medical Center
6 Weizman Street
IL-64239 Tel-Aviv (Israel)
Dror Mandel  
Department of Neonatology  
Tel Aviv-Sourasky Medical Center  
6 Weizman Street  
IL-64239 Tel-Aviv (Israel)

Francis B. Mimouni  
Department of Pediatrics  
Tel Aviv-Sourasky Medical Center  
6 Weizman Street  
IL-64239 Tel-Aviv (Israel)

Luis A. Moreno  
GENUD (Growth, Exercise, Nutrition and Development) Research Group  
Department of Physiatry and Nursing  
Faculty of Health Sciences  
C/Domingo Miral s/n  
ES-50.009 Zaragoza (Spain)

Bernadeta Patro-Gołąb  
Department of Paediatrics  
The Medical University of Warsaw  
Dzialdowska 1  
PL-01-184 Warsaw (Poland)

Chris C. Patterson  
Centre for Public Health  
Queen's University Belfast  
Institute of Clinical Sciences B  
Grosvenor Road  
Belfast BT12 6BJ (UK)

Hildegard Przyrembel  
Bolchener Str. 10  
DE-14167 Berlin (Germany)

Raanan Shamir  
Institute of Gastroenterology, Nutrition and Liver Diseases  
Schneider Children's Medical Center of Israel  
Professor of Pediatrics, Sackler Faculty of Medicine, Tel-Aviv University  
14 Kaplan St.  
IL-49202 Petach-Tikva (Israel)

Piotr Socha  
Department of Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Immunology  
Children's Memorial Health Institute in Warsaw  
Al. Dzieci Polskich 20  
PL-04-730 Warsaw (Poland)

Hania Szajewska  
Department of Paediatrics  
The Medical University of Warsaw  
Dzialdowska 1  
PL-01-184 Warsaw (Poland)

Dominique Turck  
Division of Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition  
Department of Pediatrics  
Jeanne de Flandre Children's Hospital  
Lille University Faculty of Medicine  
INSERM U995  
Avenue Eugène Avinée  
FR-59037 Lille cedex (France)

Andrea von Berg  
Department of Pediatrics  
Marien-Hospital Wesel  
Pastor-Janssen-Str. 8-38  
DE-46483 Wesel (Germany)

Robert W. Welch  
Northern Ireland Centre for Food and Health  
School of Biomedical Sciences  
University of Ulster  
Cromore Road  
Coleraine BT52 1SA (UK)

Jayne V. Woodside  
Centre for Public Health  
Queen's University Belfast  
Institute of Clinical Sciences B  
Grosvenor Road  
Belfast BT12 6BJ (UK)
Preface

'All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others'. This famous quote from George Orwell is relevant to medical research: all studies are equal but some studies are more equal than others. This reflects the hierarchy of evidence, one of the fundamental principles of evidence-based medicine (EBM), which is the topic of this book.

What exactly is EBM? The term ‘EBM’ first appeared in medical journals 21 years ago, i.e. in 1992. David Sackett, one of the pioneers in this field, defined EBM as ‘the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients’.

Since the beginning, EBM has received criticism. Terms such as ‘cookbook medicine’, as well as accusations that EBM denigrates clinical expertise and ignores patient’s views, were (and still are) commonly used and voiced by critics. Still, only 15 years after the term appeared, in 2007 the British Medical Journal considered EBM as one of the most important milestones of the last 160 years, along with such achievements as anesthesia, antibiotics, discovery of DNA structure, the pill, sanitation, or vaccines.

Thus, despite the skepticism, recognition of EBM is increasing rapidly, and it is unlikely to disappear. EBM has become essential to pediatric nutrition, hence the decision to dedicate this book to it.

The book starts with some methodological issues. It then summarizes, in a concise manner, current knowledge, but also ignorance and uncertainty, regarding some aspects of childhood nutrition. It does not intend to cover all topics, but it definitely covers the main items. It is based on evidence, summarizes current guidelines, but often, when there is no clear evidence, gives some food for thought.

Evidence, even if of the highest quality, is never enough, which is another fundamental principle of EBM. It will not apply to everyone. The evidence should not be applied blindly. Instead, the clinical decision should be an individual one and should take into account the patient context, including the patient’s values regarding specific benefits and harms.

Being up to date with current medical research in order to deliver the best possible care to patients has never been easy, and it is not getting easier. We hope this book
will provide a framework from which decisions about pediatric nutrition can be made.

As editors, we would like to thank all contributing authors for their hard work. Without their commitment, this book would not have been possible.

Hania Szajewska, Warsaw
Raanan Shamir, Petach-Tikva