

# Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

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## Subgroup on Maternal and Child Nutrition (SMCN)

**Paper for discussion: Gluten containing weaning foods  
(IDFA letter)**

**Agenda item: 4**

Please see attached paper for discussion.

# Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

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## Subgroup on Maternal and Child Nutrition (SMCN)

### Gluten containing weaning foods for infants

#### Issue

1. The Infant and Dietetic Food Association has written requesting the subgroup's clarification on the use of gluten containing weaning foods for infants. Correspondence is attached at Annex 1.

#### Background

2. The issue was discussed at the SACN main Meeting on 27 March 2002 in response to a letter from a health visitor. The committee noted that there was a continued debate on whether early introduction of gluten to infants increases their risk of coeliac disease or defers its presentation. Given the lack of evidence, the committee agreed that it would be prudent to continue with the COMA recommendation on gluten in infant foods in its 1994 report *Weaning and Weaning Diet*. The report states that:

*“To prevent coeliac disease the cereals given to infants less than 6 months should preferably be gluten free, such as rice or maize.”*

*“Where there is a family history of atopy or gluten enteropathy, mothers should be encouraged to breastfeed for six months or longer. Weaning before four months should particularly be discouraged and the introduction of foods traditionally regarded as allergenic should be delayed until six months at the earliest.” (paragraph 11.1.4)*

3. A more recent case-referent study by Ivarsson *et al* (2000) (Annex 2) concluded that the gradual introduction of gluten-containing foods into the diet of infants while they are still being breastfed reduces the risk of coeliac disease in early childhood and probably also during subsequent childhood period. A majority of children were introduced to wheat flour at 5-6 months of age.

#### Members are requested to advice on the suitability:

- of giving gluten to infants before the age of six months if they have no family history of atopy or gluten enteropathy
- of giving oats and oat ingredients to infants before six months of age.