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Development of masticatory function in extremely low and very low birthweight infants

—A follow-up study using questionnaires—

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Abstract We first conducted a questionnaire study about the development of mastication of EVLBW (extremely low and very low birthweight) infants aged 2 to 4 years in 1998, and results showed that they tended to “dislike of firm foods”, to be “picky eaters” and to have “trouble swallowing foods with a mouth full of food/drink”, when compared with the normal birthweight (NBW) infants. The purpose of the present study is so designed to investigate moreover the development of masticatory function, the oral and facial shape, dental problems, and the relationship between systemic growth and these issues in EVLBW infants. We carried out a follow-up questionnaire study 5 years later in 2003 and compared current masticatory function among EVLBW infants, the low birthweight (LBW) and NBW infants. A significantly higher number of EVLBW infants were considered to be “small eaters”, but no differences were found in the items: “picky eating”, “dislike of firm foods” and “trouble swallowing foods with a mouth full of food/drink”. This differed from a study conducted 5 years earlier. The guardians of the EVLBW infants were worried about language delay significantly and still worried about the shape of the child’s head and face significantly more often. No significant differences were found in the results of dental screening in school. In conclusion, the guardians of the EVLBW infants felt that masticatory problems decreased as their children grew. The EVLBW infants were suggested to catch up with normal infants in masticatory function by early school age.

Key words Development of mastication, Extremely low and very low birthweight, Follow-up study, Infants, Questionnaire

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