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# Ethics at the beginning of life

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## **Infants, Longitudinal Studies and Consent**

Longitudinal epidemiological studies bring their own problems to biomedical ethics, both due to the fact that many researchers and clinical personnel will be involved and since the research subjects will grow up during the research project from an age of very limited intellectual capacities to an age at which information on the project can be successfully processed and strong views on it may have developed. In particular, while informed consent cannot be obtained from the research subjects themselves at early stages of such studies, it can (in most cases) at some later stage.

The topic of this paper is how informed consent should be handled in longitudinal studies. Is it necessary to obtain consent at several stages in such projects? What restrictions, if any, should be raised concerning proxy consent for this kind of studies? What concrete solutions have been presented in the literature and what arguments are given to their support?

I will critically survey previous solutions to this problem, presented by biomedical ethicists and others, and present what I take to be the best position to take on this issue.