

Association of Breastfeeding and Child IQ Score at Age 5 Years.

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Background & Objectives: The beneficial effects of breastfeeding on infant health and development are irrefutable. **The study compares association between breastfeeding and standard measures of IQ in young children.**

Methods: This is a secondary analysis of two trials that evaluated the effects of levothyroxine treatment for women with subclinical hypothyroidism or hypothyroxinemia on IQ scores at age 5 years. The result of parent study did not identify significant differences in the IQ scores of children at age 5 years relative to intrauterine levothyroxine exposure compared with placebo. Therefore Plunkett et al examined a subset of original cohort who had retrospective breastfeeding data and IQ score data available to assess the effect of breastfeeding on IQ scores at 5 years of age.

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Breast feeding and Childhood IQ scores

Results: This secondary study included 772 women with breast-feeding data whose children did not have anomalies and did not require neonatal intensive care; 614 (80%) women reported any amount of breast-feeding.

Of these, 31% reported breastfeeding for less than 4 months, 19% for 4-6 months, 11% for 7-9 months, 15% for 10-12 months and 23% for more than 12 months. In analyses adjusting for maternal education and health insurance, 5-year-olds who were ever breast-fed were less likely to have IQ scores below 85 (adjusted odds ratio, 0.62). Each month of breast-feeding reduced the 5-year-olds' odds of an IQ score below 85 by 3.3%. However, in a sensitivity analysis of 244 propensity-score-matched children (e.g., matched on maternal age, race/ethnicity, and parity), the mean difference in IQ scores was no longer significant.

Conclusions: Breastfeeding and its duration are associated with lower odds of low IQ score at age 5 years.

Key message: Each month of breastfeeding is associated with a modest but significant reduction in the odds of a low IQ score at age 5 years.

EXPERT COMMENT

“We all are aware of many advantages of breastfeeding for both mother & infant. This well conducted study re-enforces the point that breastfeeding appears to improve IQ points in children.”

**DR SACHIN K. PATIL**

Consultant Pediatrician

Patil Kids Criticare, Yavatmal(MH)

With warm regards,

**DR MANINDER S
DHALIWAL****DR. PIYUSH GUPTA**
IAP NATIONAL
PRESIDENT 2021**DR REMESH KUMAR R.**
IAP PRESIDENT
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PAREKH**
IAP PRESIDENT
2020**DR G.V.
BASAVARAJA**
HON. SECRETARY
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Reference

Plunkett BA, Mele L, Casey BM, Varner MW, Sorokin Y, Reddy UM, Wapner RJ, Thorp JM Jr, Saade GR, Tita ATN, Rouse DJ, Sibai B, Mercer BM, Tolosa JE, Caritis SN; Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Maternal-Fetal Medicine Units (MFMU) Network. Association of Breastfeeding and Child IQ Score at Age 5 Years. Obstet Gynecol. 2021 Apr 1;137(4):561-570. doi: 10.1097/AOG.0000000000004314.