

MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW STUDY FINDS 50% INCREASED DIABETES RISK FOR MOTHERS WHO DON'T BREASTFEED

New data from Australia's largest ever study of healthy ageing, 45 and Up, shows having children increases a woman's chance of developing type 2 diabetes but breastfeeding can reduce risk to the same level as women who never had children.

The study, published in the American Diabetes Association Journal *Diabetes Care*, compared women with similar weight and looked at the combined effect on type 2 diabetes of having had children and having breastfed.

Study author, Dr Bette Liu, says, women who did not breastfeed were 50% more likely to develop diabetes later in life, compared with women who hadn't had children.

"But women who had children and breastfed each child for at least three months had no increased risk of developing diabetes," says Dr Liu.

Dr Liu says the findings are important because they show breastfeeding is something that a woman can do to modify her risk of developing diabetes.

"If you breastfeed, even for as little as three months for each child, your likelihood of developing diabetes is reduced to the same level as a woman who hasn't had children," says Dr Liu.

The findings add to the mounting evidence suggesting that breastfeeding benefits mothers as well as babies.

Type 2 Diabetes is an increasing health problem in Australia. More than one million Australians have diabetes and about half are unaware. Diabetes is now the fastest growing chronic disease in Australia and the seventh highest cause of death.

Study co-author Prof Emily Banks says policymakers need to think about making it as easy as possible for women to breastfeed.

"Diabetes is an important and increasing health problem and strategies to prevent it are critical," says Professor Banks.

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MAIN FINDINGS

The study *Parity, Breastfeeding And The Subsequent Risk Of Maternal Type 2 Diabetes* examined the effect of childbearing and maternal breastfeeding on a woman's subsequent risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

- This study shows how the association between childbearing and type 2 diabetes is affected by breastfeeding.
- 52,731 women were in the analyses, 6% were classified as having type 2 diabetes. 89% had at least one birth and among these women the median parity was 3 and 86% had breastfed for at least one month.
- Among women who breastfed, the median total duration of breastfeeding was 12 months or a median of 4.5 months per child.
- Compared to nulliparous women, parous women had a similar risk of diabetes
- There was no evidence of increased risk with increasing number of children either overall or among parous women who had never breastfed.
- Among parous women, the total duration of breastfeeding and duration of breastfeeding per child was associated with a reduced likelihood of diabetes; the reduction in risk per year of breastfeeding was 14%
- Compared to nulliparous women, the risk of diabetes was not significantly different for parous women who breastfed, however for parous women who did not breastfeed the risk of diabetes was significantly greater
- This pattern of association was consistent regardless of the number of children a woman had given birth to and regardless of BMI.
- Compared to nulliparous women, women who have children but do not breastfeed have an increased risk of diabetes in later life, but that this excess risk may be avoided in women who breastfeed each child for at least 3 months.
- The results confirm previous work suggesting that parous women who breastfeed can reduce their risk of developing type 2 diabetes in later life and that the benefit increases the longer the duration of breastfeeding.
- Study investigators analysed data from 52,631 women who were recruited into the 45 and Up Study and had provided information on the number of children they had, the time they breastfed for and other health information.

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THE 45 & UP STUDY

The Sax Institute established the 45 and Up Study in 2008. Australia's largest long term study of ageing comprises over 265,000 participants aged 45 and over is providing a crucial understanding of the health needs of people as they age. The Study will identify Australians who might particularly benefit from prevention or early treatment and evaluate the impact of current and future health services.

The 45 and Up Study provides health leaders with an unprecedented, world-leading, resource for answering questions about ageing. Study participants provide information about their personal circumstances, their health, the services they use and allow researchers to link to their medical records.

Acknowledgements:

The 45 and Up Study is managed by the Sax Institute in collaboration with major partner Cancer Council New South Wales; and partners the National Heart Foundation of Australia (NSW Division); NSW Health; *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*; Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Human Services NSW; and UnitingCare Ageing. The study was also supported by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

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