

Exclusive breastfeeding lowers odds of some schoolchildren having eczema

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Children exclusively breastfed for three months or longer were significantly less likely to have continued eczema at age 6, compared with peers who were never breastfed or who were breastfed for less than three months. While exclusive breastfeeding may not prevent kids from getting eczema, it may protect them from experiencing extended flare-ups. #AAAAI19

- Katherine M. Balas, BS, BA



Children's National



Balas and colleagues tapped data collected in Infant Feeding Practices Study II, a longitudinal study co-led by the CDC and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from 2005 to 2007, as well as the agencies' 2012 follow-up examination of that study cohort. This study first tracked the diets of about 2,000 [pregnant women](#) from their third trimester and examined feeding practices through their babies' first year of life. Their follow-up inquiry looked at the health, development and dietary patterns for 1,520 of these children at 6 years of age.

Exclusive breastfeeding lowers odds of some schoolchildren having eczema. Credit: Children's National Health System

Children exclusively breastfed for the first three months of life had significantly lower odds of having eczema at age 6 compared with peers who were not breastfed or were breastfed for less time, according to preliminary research presented during the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology 2019 Annual Meeting.

Eczema is a [chronic condition](#) characterized by extremely itchy skin that, when scratched, becomes inflamed and covered with blisters that crack easily. While genes and the environment are implicated in this inflammatory disease, many questions remain unanswered, such as how best to prevent it. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), breastfed infants have reduced risks for developing many chronic conditions, including asthma and obesity.

"The evidence that being exclusively breastfed protects children from developing eczema later in life remains mixed," says Katherine M. Balas, BS, BA, a clinical research assistant at Children's National and the study's lead author. "Our research team is trying to help fill that data gap."



Exclusive breastfeeding may not prevent eczema or eczema diagnosis, but may play a protective role in decreasing the chronicity of eczema in childhood. Credit: Children's National Health System

About 300 of the children had been diagnosed with eczema at some point in their lives, and 58.5 percent of the 6-year-olds had eczema at the time of the CDC/FDA Year Six Follow-Up. Children with higher socioeconomic status or a family history of food allergies had higher odds of being diagnosed with eczema.

"Children who were exclusively breastfed for three

months or longer were significantly less likely (adjusted odds ratio: 0.477) to have continued eczema at age 6, compared with peers who were never breastfed or who were [breastfed](#) for less than three months," Balas adds. "While exclusive breastfeeding may not prevent kids from getting [eczema](#), it may protect them from experiencing extended flare-ups."

More information: American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology 2019 Annual Meeting presentation

* "Exclusive breastfeeding in infancy and eczema diagnosis at 6 years of age."

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Provided by Children's National Medical Center

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