

# Sugary beverages consumed while breastfeeding affect cognitive development in children

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A diet high in sugar during adulthood is associated with weight gain, and has also been linked to risk of type 2 diabetes, fatty liver disease, and heart disease. New research shows that when consumed by moms during the breastfeeding period, a high sugar diet can also impact developmental outcomes during infancy.

Michael I. Goran, Ph.D., Program Director for Diabetes and Obesity at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, has studied how [sugar](#) can impact family health. His previous research has shown that moms who consume sugary beverages and juices in the months after giving birth are at risk for [weight gain](#), and may also expose their newborns to these added sugars through breast milk. A new study published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* reveals that consuming these beverages during the [breastfeeding](#) period may also lead to poorer cognitive development in children nearly two years later.

The participants were 88 mothers who reported sugary beverages and juices consumed per day during the first month of breastfeeding. Their children were assessed using the Bayley-III Scales of Infant Development at 2 years old. Moms who reported greater consumption of [sugary beverages](#) and juices had children with poorer cognitive development scores. The researchers speculated that added sugar from the mom's diet was passed to their infant through breast milk, and this exposure could conceivably interfere with brain development.

"Breastfeeding can have so many benefits," says Dr. Goran, "but we're seeing that [breast milk](#) is influenced by what moms eat and drink even more than we realized." He says that limiting added sugars, found in beverages such as [soft drinks](#), may have benefits not only for moms, but also for babies. "Moms may not realize that what they eat and drink during breastfeeding may influence their infant's development down the road, but that's what our results indicate."

"Ultimately, we want babies to receive the best quality nutrition," says Paige K. Berger, Ph.D., RD, Postdoctoral Research Fellow and first author of the study. "Our findings may be used to guide future nutrition recommendations for moms during breastfeeding, to better ensure that babies are getting the right building blocks for cognitive development."

**More information:** Paige K Berger et al, Associations of maternal fructose and sugar-sweetened beverage and juice intake during lactation with infant neurodevelopmental outcomes at 24 months, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2020). [DOI: 10.1093/ajcn/nqaa255](https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqaa255)

Provided by Children's Hospital Los Angeles

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