

Breastfed Babies Have Enhanced Lung Function

Written by [Laurel Haring](#) Monday, November 10 2008 16:53



Ready for another positive effect of breastfeeding? A UK study has found that 10-year-old children who had been breastfed for at least four months had enhanced lung volume.

An article at BBC News online ([here](#)) reports that a study published in the medical journal *Thorax* indicates that the physical effort of nursing may yield better lung function as long as 10 years later. In the study, children who were breastfed for four months or longer had better lung function than those who weren't breastfed at all, or who were breastfed for less than four months.

Nearly 1,500 children on the Isle of Wight, UK, were followed from birth through their first 10 years. Those children who had been breastfed for four months could blow out more air after taking a deep breath, and blow it out harder, than those children who had not been breastfed. The mother's asthmatic or allergic status had no effect on the results.

Theories

One of the study's authors theorizes that this enhanced lung function may be because nursing is hard work for a baby: extracting milk from a breast is a *lot* harder than extracting milk from a bottle. It takes three times the sucking power to nurse compared to bottle feeding. On top of that, babies who nurse tend to spend more time feeding than bottle-fed babies. Interestingly, one of the researchers noted that pulmonary rehabilitation exercises performed by older patients and the breathing patterns of nursing babies are quite similar.

Although other studies suggest that immunities passed from mother to baby in the breast milk may protect this baby from developing asthma, this new study's findings seem to suggest that other factors might be at work.

Next Steps

The researchers would like to test their theory by using a bottle that mimics the effort needed to breastfeed. If their theory is proven correct, then it could be possible for babies who are not breastfed to experience the same lung-strengthening benefit.

Laurel Haring is a writer. She lives with her family in Wilmington, Delaware, and posts semi-regularly to her blog, Let [Me Say This About That](#). She cheers yet another benefit of nursing and hopes that a bottle can be developed that will allow those babies who are not nursed – for whatever reason – to reap the same benefit. After all, don't we all want healthy children?

The effect of breastfeeding duration on lung function at age 10 years: a prospective birth cohort study

Thorax. Published Online First: 10 November 2008. doi:10.1136/thx.2008.101543

<http://www.typeamom.net/breastfed-babies-have-enhanced-lung-function.html>