

# Breastfeeding Is the Norm

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The authors of an article in the latest issue of Maternal and Child Nutrition say that breastfeeding is not “best” – it is simply the normal way to feed human infants. They contend that the “breast is best” message is at the very least misleading, because it doesn’t communicate the importance of breastfeeding.

Nina Berry, a doctoral student at the University of Wollongong's Centre for Health Initiatives, and Karleen Gribble of the University of Western Sydney have authored an article titled "Breast is no longer best: promoting normal infant feeding." In it, they contend that describing breastfeeding as "best" undermine a woman's ability to make informed decisions about how to feed her infant.

The news release from the University of Wollongong (full text [here](#)) states that the authors believe that it is possible that the "breast is best" message may actually obscure the importance of breastfeeding to both infant and maternal health, as well as the documented risks associated with early weaning from breastfeeding.

"To say that ‘breast is best’ is to suggest that what breastfeeding offers is a handful of optional bonuses and that formula-fed infants are the normal standard for comparison," Berry is quoted as saying. "In fact, human babies were designed to be fed human milk."

She goes on to point out "that while most people accept that breastfed babies are healthier, they do not understand that this means that formula-fed babies are likely to be sicker. Because formula feeding is viewed as harmless, women are not getting the support they need to continue breastfeeding and to make informed choices about infant feeding." Berry contends that the "breast is best" message is not effective in promoting breastfeeding.

Another point made in the paper is that breastfed babies, not formula-fed babies, should comprise the control group in research since they are at a decreased risk of adverse health outcomes. Breastfed babies should also be used as the basis of growth charts, say the authors. They theorize that using growth charts that are based on formula-fed babies, which gain weight much more rapidly than breastfed babies, could be a contributing factor to the current obesity epidemic.

The World Health Organization recommends that infants be given breast milk exclusively for the first six months of their lives and that they be breastfed for up to two years or more. These can be tough goals for mothers to reach. What makes these goals tougher to achieve, contend the authors, is that health professionals don't really grasp the risks associated with the early introduction of foods other than human milk. In addition, many of these professionals don't want to talk about these risks with mothers because they don't want to make them feel guilty.

"This is not about guilt," says Berry. "It is about a mother's right to have all the information she needs to make an informed choice about how to feed her baby. It is about ensuring that mothers have the support they need."

### ***About the Author***

*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](#).*

<http://www.typeamom.net/breastfeeding-is-the-norm.html>