

Study Proves the Relationship Between Length of Maternity Leave and Breastfeeding Success

Written by [Laurel Haring](#) Monday, January 12 2009 15:16

The January edition of the medical journal *Pediatrics* has two articles related to breastfeeding. The first shows that the success of establishing breastfeeding and its continuation are clearly related to longer maternity leaves, among other factors. The second article believes that communicating the negative health effects of so-called third-hand smoke could lead more households to ban the practice.

"Juggling Work and Breastfeeding: Effects of Maternity Leave and Occupational Characteristics"

This article calls for pediatricians to encourage their patients to take maternity leave and advocate for extending paid postpartum leave and increasing flexibility in working conditions for breastfeeding women. (Note that the study was conducted in California, one of only five states in the U.S. that provides paid pregnancy leave that can be extended for infant bonding.)

One important reason women stop breastfeeding during the first six months of their babies' lives is the inherent challenge of balancing nursing and full-time occupation outside the home.

The first article reports on the relationship between breastfeeding establishment and breastfeeding cessation and maternity leave before and after delivery.

The authors found that a maternity leave of six or fewer weeks produced four-fold odds that the mother would fail to establish breastfeeding and an increased probability of cessation after successful establishment. Maternity leave of six to 12 weeks after delivery reduced those odds by half. The authors did not find any association between leave that began during the last month of pregnancy and the establishment or duration of breastfeeding.

The effect of longer postpartum leave was found to have a much more positive effect on breastfeeding among women who work full time outside the home, in particular those who are in nonmanagerial positions, those whose jobs don't allow for flexibility, and for those women who are experiencing what the authors describe as "psychosocial stress".

Since many women return to full-time occupations outside the home (i.e., work or school) within the first three months of their infants' lives, the authors believe that "policies and practices are needed that support the minimal goal of six months of

exclusive breastfeeding." The authors also call for pediatricians to encourage women to take maternity leave and advocate for extending paid postpartum maternity leave and increased flexibility in working conditions for nursing mothers.

"Third-Hand" Smoke and Home Smoking Bans

The second article in *Pediatrics*, "[Beliefs About the Health Effects of 'Third-hand' Smoke and Home Smoking Bans](#)" explores the relationship between beliefs about the negative health effects of "third-hand" smoke and home smoking bans. The study defines "third-hand" smoke as "residual tobacco smoke contamination that remains after the cigarette is extinguished," for example, in a smoker's clothing and hair, as well as in a nursing woman's breast milk.

The authors believe that emphasizing the negative effects of third-hand smoke on children could result in more households banning smoking and that this message can be easily incorporated into tobacco-control campaigns and physicians' practices.

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 believes that the drive in the U.S. to get new mothers and fathers back to work as soon as possible after their child's birth or adoption is counterproductive. After all, happy parents make happy, productive workers, right?

<http://www.typeamom.net/study-proves-the-relationship-between-length-of-maternity-leave-and-breastfeeding-success.html>