

Researchers find breastfeeding linked to higher neurocognitive testing scores

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New research finds that children who were breastfed scored higher on neurocognitive tests. Researchers in the Del Monte Institute for Neuroscience at the University of Rochester Medical Center (URMC) analyzed thousands of cognitive tests taken by nine and ten-year-olds whose mothers reported they were breastfed, and compared those results to scores of children who were not.

"Our findings suggest that any amount of breastfeeding has a positive cognitive impact, even after just a few months." Daniel Adan Lopez, Ph.D. candidate in the Epidemiology program who is first author on the study recently published in the journal *Frontiers in Public Health*. "That's what's exciting about these results. Hopefully from a policy standpoint, this can help improve the motivation to breastfeed."

Hayley Martin, Ph.D., a fourth year [medical student](#) in the Medical Scientist Training Program and co-author of the study, focuses her research on breastfeeding. "There's already established research showing the numerous benefits breastfeeding has for both mother and child. This

study's findings are important for families particularly before and soon after birth when breastfeeding decisions are made. It may encourage breastfeeding goals of one year or more. It also highlights the critical importance of continued work to provide equity focused access to breastfeeding support, prenatal education, and practices to eliminate structural barriers to breastfeeding."

Researchers reviewed the test results of more than 9,000 nine and ten-year-old participants in the [Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development \(ABCD\) study](#). Variations were found in the cumulative cognitive test scores of breastfed and non-breastfed [children](#). There was also evidence that the longer a child was breastfed, the higher they scored.

"The strongest association was in children who were breastfed more than 12 months," said Lopez. "The scores of children [breastfed](#) until they were seven to 12 months were slightly less, and then the one to six month-old scores dips a little more. But all scores were higher when compared to children who didn't breastfeed at all." Previous studies found breastfeeding does not impact executive function or memory, findings in this study made similar findings.

"This supports the foundation of work already being done around lactation and [breastfeeding](#) and its impact on a child's health," said Ed Freedman, Ph.D., the principal investigator of the ABCD study in Rochester and lead author of the study. "These are findings that would have not been possible without the ABCD Study and the expansive data set it provides."

More information: Daniel A. Lopez et al. Breastfeeding Duration Is Associated With Domain-Specific Improvements in Cognitive Performance in 9–10-Year-Old Children, *Frontiers in Public Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.3389/fpubh.2021.657422](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.657422)

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