

Women who breastfeed for more than a year halve their risk of rheumatoid arthritis

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Women who breast feed for longer have a smaller chance of getting rheumatoid arthritis, suggests a study published online ahead of print in the *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases*.

The study also found that taking oral contraceptives, which are suspected to protect against the disease because they contain hormones that are raised in pregnancy, did not have the same effect. Also, simply having children and not breast feeding also did not seem to be protective.

The researchers compared 136 women with rheumatoid arthritis with 544 women of a similar age without the disease. They found that those who had breast fed for longer were much less likely to get rheumatoid arthritis.

Women who had breastfed for 13 months or more were half as likely to get rheumatoid arthritis as those who had never breast fed. Those who had breast fed for one to 12 months were 25 per cent less likely to get the disease.

The proportion of women breast feeding for more than six months has increased dramatically over the past 30 years. The authors concluded that it was difficult to say whether there was a connection between higher rates of breast feeding and a corresponding fall in the number of women affected by rheumatoid arthritis, but that the results of the study provided yet another reason why women should continue breast feeding.

Source: British Medical Journal

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