

Can breastfeeding reduce multiple sclerosis relapses?

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Women who have multiple sclerosis may reduce their risk of relapses after pregnancy if they breastfeed their babies, according to a study released today that will be presented at the American Academy of Neurology's 61st Annual Meeting in Seattle, April 25 to May 2, 2009.

For the study, researchers followed 32 pregnant women with MS and 29 pregnant women without MS during each trimester and up to a year after they gave birth. The women were interviewed about their breastfeeding and menstrual period history.

A total of 52 percent of the women with MS did not breastfeed or began supplemental formula feedings within two months of giving birth. Of those, 87 percent had a relapse after pregnancy compared to 36 percent of women with MS who breastfed exclusively for at least two months after pregnancy.

Sixty percent of the women reported their main reason for not breastfeeding exclusively was to start taking MS treatments again. Women who began taking MS treatments within the first two months after giving birth had significantly higher risk of suffering a relapse than women with MS who did not start taking medications early, regardless of whether they breastfed. Those who breastfed exclusively got their menstrual periods back later than the women who did not breastfeed or began early supplemental feedings.

"Our findings call into question the benefit of choosing not to breastfeed

or stopping breastfeeding early in order to start taking MS therapies," said study author Annette Langer-Gould, MD, PhD, of Stanford University in California, and a member of the American Academy of Neurology. "Larger studies need to be done on whether women should delay taking MS medications in order to breastfeed."

Source: American Academy of Neurology

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