

Breastfeeding can reduce maternal breast cancer and heart disease, and save \$17 billion in societal costs, study finds

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(Medical Xpress)—Mothers who breastfeed are at significantly lower risk of developing breast cancer, hypertension and suffering heart attacks than women who do not, according to researchers at Harvard Medical School and the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. The study findings, published today in *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, estimate that suboptimal breastfeeding currently results in \$859 million in health care costs and over \$17.4 billion in societal costs from maternal deaths before the age of 70.

Using sophisticated modeling simulations, researchers evaluated the effects of infant feeding practices on five maternal health conditions: breast cancer, premenopausal ovarian cancer, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and myocardial infarction ([heart attack](#)). The study findings indicate that if 90 percent of mothers were able to breastfeed as recommended (for 12 months after each birth), U.S. women might be spared:

- Over 53,000 cases of [hypertension](#)
- Roughly 14,000 heart attacks
- Nearly 5,000 cases of breast cancer

"Anyone wearing a pink ribbon to fight [breast cancer](#), or a red dress to fight heart disease, should take note of these findings", said co-author

Eleanor Bimla Schwarz, M.D., M.S., associate professor of medicine, epidemiology, and obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive services at Pitt's School Of Medicine.

"While breastfeeding is widely recognized as important to infant health, more people need to understand that breastfeeding appears to have substantial long-term effects on women's health as well," Dr. Schwarz explained.

Previous studies have illustrated the adverse health effects suboptimal breastfeeding has on infants and children, and estimated these result in over \$14 billion in health costs. This study is the first to examine the maternal health burden of current rates of lactation in terms of both [health](#) and economic costs.

Provided by University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

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