

Birthweight and breastfeeding have implications for children's health decades later

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Young adults who were breastfed for three months or more as babies have a significantly lower risk of chronic inflammation associated with cardiovascular and metabolic diseases, according to research from the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis.

"This study shows that birthweight and breastfeeding both have implications for children's health decades later," said Molly W. Metzger, PhD, assistant professor at the Brown School and a co-author of the study with Thomas W. McDade, PhD, of Northwestern University.

"Specifically, we are looking at the effects of these early factors on later levels of C-reactive protein (CRP), a biomarker associated with risk for cardiovascular and [metabolic disease](#)," Metzger said. "Comparing the long-term effects of breastfeeding to the effects of clinical trials of [statin therapy](#), we find breastfeeding to exert effects that are as large or larger."

The researchers used data from the U.S. National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, including parent surveys, and blood samples providing measurements of CRP.

These findings held up in a series of sibling models, in which one sibling was breastfed and the other was not. Such models provide improved confidence in the results by implicitly controlling for genetic factors for

elevated CRP.

"These findings underscore the importance of a preventive approach, including but not limited to prenatal health care and postnatal [breastfeeding](#) support," Metzger said. "And we know that insured women receive less prenatal care than insured women.

"So here in Missouri and elsewhere, expanding Medicaid eligibility would be one clear step in the right direction," Metzger said.

The study was published in June in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*.

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Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

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