

Breastfeeding decisions

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(Medical Xpress)—Mothers concerned about their changing shape and appearance during pregnancy are less likely to breastfeed after their baby is born, new research has uncovered.

In a collaborative study published in the journal of Midwifery, experts from the University's School of Healthcare Sciences followed 128 mums to be through their pregnancy until their baby was six months old.

During pregnancy [mothers](#) reported how they felt about their [changing shape](#) and appearance and their concerns for their body after the birth

alongside considering how they would feed their baby after it was born.

Those who held higher concerns for their appearance or who were trying to limit their food intake during pregnancy were less likely to plan to or start [breastfeeding](#) at birth, or if they did so, only breastfed for a short period of time.

Further exploration showed that mothers with higher [body image](#) concerns but who did initiate breastfeeding were more likely to stop specifically because they were uncomfortable with the changing appearance of their body during breastfeeding or felt embarrassed or ashamed breastfeeding in front of other people or in public.

Dr Lucie Warren, Lecturer in Midwifery in the School of Healthcare Sciences said: "We know that breastfeeding is important for the health of both [babies](#) and mothers but many mothers tell us that they find it difficult or need more support.

"Understanding the multitude of factors that affect breastfeeding duration such as body image and concerns mothers may have about their changing shape and role of their body after their baby is born is important for those working to support [new mothers](#) during this time."

Dr Amy Brown from Swansea University's College of Human and Health Sciences who led the study said: "The findings indicate that mothers' feelings about their changing shape and how their body might look different might be affecting their decision to breastfeed. What is interesting is that their feelings during [pregnancy](#) are driving their choice after their baby is born, rather than their experience of breastfeeding alone.

"It is likely that low confidence and anxiety about their appearance, potentially driven by the rise of celebrity culture and pressure to lose

weight quickly after the birth could be affecting choice to breastfeed.

"Myths about the impact of breastfeeding on appearance or incorrect beliefs that you cannot lose weight whilst breastfeeding might further impact upon their choice.

"We need to raise awareness of positive body image during breastfeeding and reduce this unhealthy pressure on new mums to return to 'normal' and not look like they have been pregnant immediately after their baby is born."

More information: A. Brown, J. Rance, L. Warren, "Body image concerns during pregnancy are associated with a shorter breastfeeding duration," *Midwifery*, Available online 2 July 2014, ISSN 0266-6138, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2014.06.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2014.06.003)
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