

# Breastfeeding study shows need for effective peer counseling programs

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UGA graduate student Arielle Weekley and Alex Anderson, an associate professor of foods and nutrition, study data from the BodPod, which measures body composition. Credit: Cal Powell/UGA

The support of peer groups and clinicians is critical to the development of effective breastfeeding programs, according to recent University of Georgia research.

A qualitative study of 21 [mothers](#) in the Athens-Clarke County area determined that role models for successful breastfeeding help positively shape the outcomes of mothers of infants.

"Mothers who received that [support](#) are more likely to be successful at breastfeeding," said study co-author Alex Anderson, an associate professor in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences department of foods and nutrition. "Most of them attributed the support they

received to the peer counselors, which goes to show that if we have community breastfeeding peer counselors, they can help a lot of mothers."

The motivation for the research, published in *Journal of Neonatal Nursing*, was to examine different forms of support that were helpful to [breastfeeding mothers](#), said the study's lead author Rachel Powell, a research assistant in the College of Public Health.

"We wanted to identify barriers to recognize areas of improvement to ensure breastfeeding women are well supported," she said.

"Breastfeeding has significant health benefits not just for the baby, but for the mother as well."

Studies have shown that infants who are breastfed are less likely to develop diarrheal diseases, ear infections and asthma, and that breastfeeding can protect the mother against breast, cervical and endometrial cancer.

Breastfeeding rates are low throughout the South, which could be due to the region's generally conservative views that might conflict with breastfeeding in public, Anderson said. The U.S. in general reports lower [breastfeeding rates](#) than other developed countries.

As part of the study, researchers conducted interviews with mothers of infants from the Athens community, including 12 from the Athens branch of Women, Infants and Children, or WIC, which serves low-income mothers, and nine from Full Bloom Pregnancy and Early Parenting Center, which tends to serve middle income, highly educated mothers, Anderson said.

Roughly 75 percent of the mothers who participated in the study reported negative or no support from their clinician or hospital staff

regarding breastfeeding.

"It's surprising because as a clinician that should be the first step, to talk about breastfeeding with pregnant women and [new mothers](#)," Anderson said. "The support does take some time, and they don't have time. If you're going to talk to mothers about breastfeeding, it's going to take you at least 30 minutes to an hour to do it effectively."

Anderson said he hopes the study shines light on the critical role [clinicians](#) and lactation specialists play in teaching and encouraging breastfeeding.

"Clinicians should be targeted to educate them about [breastfeeding](#) support," he said. "I also think that to save the clinicians some time, (hospitals and communities should) run a peer counselor program and refer patients to such programs for support."

**More information:** The journal article, "A qualitative look into mother's breastfeeding experiences," is available at [www.journalofneonatalnursing.c ... \(14\)00038-6/abstract](http://www.journalofneonatalnursing.c... (14)00038-6/abstract)

Provided by University of Georgia

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