

Shopping vouchers for breastfeeding set for wide-scale trial

November 21 2014, by Amy Pullan



A pioneering project aimed at boosting breastfeeding rates in areas where levels remain stubbornly low will be tested in a large-scale trial by researchers at the Universities of Sheffield, Dundee and Brunel.

The NOurishing Start for Health (NOSH) scheme offers women £120 of shopping vouchers if they breastfeed their baby for up to six weeks and a further £80 if they continue [breastfeeding](#) to six months.

Breastfeeding has a wide range of benefits for both mothers and babies and can help prevent illnesses in children¹ and also reduce the costs to the National Health Service².

However, [breastfeeding rates](#) in the UK are among the lowest in the world with six to eight week breastfeeding levels as low as 12 per cent in some areas. If more women breastfed for longer the NHS could save more than £17 million every year in hospital admissions and GP visits².

The wide-scale trial builds on the success of the initial feasibility phase, launched in November 2013 with over 100 women living in three areas with low breastfeeding rates in Derbyshire and South Yorkshire.

Over half of all eligible mothers signed up for the scheme, of whom almost two thirds claimed vouchers for breastfeeding their baby at six to eight weeks.

Mothers in the study reported that they felt acknowledged for their effort, with one mother describing her experience of the NOSH scheme as: "Getting something good for doing something good."

The scheme was designed by researchers and local [healthcare professionals](#) to complement existing breastfeeding support.

In the feasibility phase more than 50 midwives and health visitors helped women sign up to the scheme. One midwife commented: "If more mums breastfeed because of the scheme, then it's worth doing."

Midwives and health visitors co-signed the forms used by breast-feeding mothers to claim the shopping vouchers. A Sheffield midwife said: "I don't think it's difficult to tell if a woman is breastfeeding as you are talking to them about breastfeeding anyway."

Mothers taking part in the project reported spending the vouchers on groceries as well as nappies, baby clothes and toys. Some women used the scheme to set personal goals, and saw the vouchers as a reward for breastfeeding to two days, 10 days, six weeks, three months and six

months.

One mother in the feasibility study said: "Sometimes you think 'should I just move on to the bottle now?' and then I think 'oh but then I won't get the money to be able to treat them', so it does help".

Principal investigator Dr Clare Relton from the University of Sheffield's School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR), said: "For several decades now the majority of babies in the UK have not been getting enough breast milk, and despite many efforts, this situation has not improved. Now we need to conduct the full trial to find out if offering vouchers for breastfeeding can significantly increase our stubbornly low breastfeeding rates and be a cost effective use of UK public funds.

"Last year, there was a lot of controversy about the scheme and we didn't know if it would be acceptable, so we have been delighted to see how enthusiastic local mothers and healthcare professionals have been."

Mary Renfrew, Professor of Mother and Infant Health at the University of Dundee said: "In areas where most babies are bottle fed women need support to breastfeed. This scheme could make a difference. It's great to be able to test it properly in a large trial."

Provided by University of Sheffield

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