

Study suggests breastmilk promotes brain development in preemies

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With organs including the brain completing development during the final months and weeks of pregnancy, it may not be surprising that preterm birth is a leading cause of neurologic problems in children. A new research abstract being presented at the Pediatric Academic Societies 2016 Meeting shows that breastmilk may help promote brain development in premature babies, which could possibly help protect them from neurologic disorders.

For the study, "Effects of Breast Milk Consumption in the First Month of Life on Early Brain Development in Premature Infants," researchers at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis followed a socio-demographically diverse group of 77 preterm infants in the St. Louis Children's Hospital Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. The infants underwent an MRI scan while sleeping or resting at about the time they would have been born had they not arrived early. These images were used to evaluate both the [brain volume](#) and the surface area of the cortex of their brains.

Senior author Cynthia Rogers, MD, said the more days the [premature babies](#) consumed at least half their daily fluid intake in the form of breastmilk within the first month of life, the more total brain tissue volume and cortical surface area they had near the time of their full-term date.

"Changes in brain volume and cortical [surface area](#) may be related to intelligence, attention or emotional regulation later in life. So we would

hypothesize that the larger volumes and cortical surface areas we observed may suggest better developmental outcomes later in life," said Dr. Rogers, an assistant professor of child psychiatry and pediatrics at Washington University School of Medicine. She said being born prematurely also has been linked to psychiatric disorders later in childhood, and the study's findings also hold promise to protect against these conditions.

"We will need to continue studying these children, though, to understand whether the effects of [breast milk](#) on the brain really have an impact on cognitive function as the very preterm children grow up," she said.

More information: www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view...hp?nu=PAS16L1_4605.2

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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