

When new moms work longer hours, breast-feeding takes a back seat

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(HealthDay)—Every working mom knows how hard it can be to juggle

the demands of her job with the needs of her new baby, particularly when it comes to breast-feeding.

Now, a new study has concluded that the more hours a new mom works, the tougher it is for her to continue breast-feeding.

Mothers working 19 or fewer hours a week were much more likely to maintain breast-feeding through their babies' sixth month of life, compared to moms who had returned to full-time employment, said lead researcher Ning Xiang.

"Every effort should be made to enable [new mothers](#) to spend more time with their newborn to establish and maintain breast-feeding," said Xiang, a research assistant with the University of Queensland Institute for Social Science Research, in Australia.

"Governments should consider measures to encourage new [mothers](#) to delay their return to [work](#), such as paid parental leave. Employers should be encouraged to be lactation-friendly and to provide flexible work arrangements to new mothers," she added.

Breast milk is incredibly beneficial to the health of newborns, according to the U.S. Office on Women's Health. The milk contains rich nutrients and antibodies, and babies who are breast-fed are less likely to develop asthma, ear infections, eczema, diarrhea or vomiting, [lower respiratory infections](#), type 2 diabetes and obesity. They're also less likely to fall prey to childhood leukemia or SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome), research has shown.

Any return to work caused some decline in the number of mothers who still breast-fed their babies, according to results Xiang and her colleagues obtained from a survey of 2,300 working mothers in Australia.

But women employed up to 19 hours a week only faced a 10 percent chance that they quit breast-feeding altogether by their baby's sixth month, the researchers found.

On the other hand, women working between 20 hours and 34 hours a week had a 45 percent chance of stopping, and moms working 35 or more hours had a 60 percent chance that they'd drop breast-feeding.

"Given the time-consuming nature of breast-feeding, mothers need to be physically with their baby to maintain breast-feeding, particularly in the first six months of the baby's life," Xiang said. "Working more than 20 hours entails that mothers would have to spend less time with their baby."

The findings were published online May 16 in the journal *Pediatrics*.

Breast-feeding is not always simple to start, and new mothers often feel pressured to return to work before they're ready, said Diana West. She is a board-certified lactation consultant and director of media relations for La Leche League International, a breast-feeding advocacy group.

"Many women are going back to work much sooner than their milk supplies would like them to do," West said. "Many women have difficulty in the first few weeks and sometimes months, not only just getting breast-feeding off to a good start but getting all the kinks smoothed out. And just when they do, they've got to go back to work to keep their health insurance and pay their bills."

The study findings suggest that businesses should provide assistance to new mothers by offering work schedules that help keep them home with their baby, said Kate Dupont Phillips. She is a population health specialist at Nemours Health & Prevention Services, a Delaware-based child health and wellness research program.

"This study demonstrates there's a lot of flexibility to be had, and there's no one right way to support moms," she said.

Allowing new mothers to work part-time is an option that's been mulled over, and this study shows it's a good idea, Phillips said. Work programs like job-sharing, telecommuting or flex time also can help moms minimize the amount of time they're away from their baby.

Paid extended maternity leave is the best and most basic option, West said, and many companies are beginning to recognize the value of giving women time to devote all their attention to their new babies.

Paid leave has been shown to reduce health care expenses associated with sick babies, which in turn lowers the cost of health insurance for employers, she said.

By offering paid leave or flexible working schedules, employers also avoid having to replace moms forced to choose their baby's [health](#) over their job, West added.

"When we have happy employees, then the companies don't have to replace that position and retrain and rehire," she said.

Businesses also can support new moms by providing a clean, sanitary private room for breast milk pumping "that is not a bathroom or a dismal closet," West said.

More information: For more on business support of breast-feeding, visit the [U.S. Office on Women's Health](#).

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