

Breast-feeding lowers mom's breast cancer risk: study

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(HealthDay)—Breast-feeding helps protect women against breast cancer,

a new report finds.

Of the 18 studies analyzed by the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR), 13 found the risk of [breast cancer](#) dropped 2 percent for every five months a woman breast-fed.

The report, updating [global science](#) on breast cancer, also found that breast-fed babies are less likely to gain excess weight as they grow, which could reduce their cancer risk later in life. In adults, being overweight or obese increases the risk for 11 common cancers, according to the AICR.

"It isn't always possible for moms to breast-feed but for those who can, know that breast-feeding can offer cancer protection for both the mother and the child," said Alice Bender, director of nutrition programs for the institute.

Breast-feeding is protective in several ways, according to the report. It may delay return of a new mother's menstrual periods, reducing lifetime exposure to hormones like estrogen, which are linked to [breast cancer risk](#). In addition, the shedding of [breast tissue](#) after lactation may help get rid of cells with DNA damage.

The report added that maintaining a healthy weight, avoiding alcohol and being physically active also reduce breast cancer risk.

"With the many benefits of breast-feeding, it's important that new moms get support to successfully breast-feed for longer than a few days or weeks," Bender said in an institute news release. "It's also critical to know there are steps all women can take to lower the risk of this cancer."

Besides providing babies with important nutrients, breast-feeding also strengthens their immune system and helps protect them from illness.

AICR recommends new mothers breast-feed exclusively for up to six months and then add other liquids and foods to the baby's diet.

Other health organizations, including the World Health Organization, make similar recommendations.

More information: The U.S. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development has more on [breast-feeding](#).

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