

# New mothers' breastfeeding pain can affect infant health

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Breastfeeding pain is not often recognized as a problem, but a majority

of first-time mothers experience this type of pain, which may lead some to stop breastfeeding altogether. A new study from Western University has discovered that the pain experienced is often severe and leads to avoidance and other pain-related behaviours, which could have health implications for the feeding child.

"This study allowed us to better understand that severe and distressing pain is a common experience for [breastfeeding](#) mothers and that for some, this pain plays a role in their decision making around stopping breastfeeding earlier than they planned," says Kimberley Jackson, the study's lead author and an Assistant Professor in Western's Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing. "We know that breastfeeding leads to better [health](#) outcomes for [women](#) and children and finding ways to help women breastfeed comfortably is a win-win for both mother and child."

Leading health authorities recommend exclusive breastfeeding for infants up to six months of age due to the numerous health benefits that extend to infants and mothers, especially when it is done exclusively and for longer durations. Evidence suggests that breastfeeding decreases incidences of childhood infections, lowers risk of [sudden infant death](#) syndrome (SIDS) and neonatal mortality rates; and reduces the risk of childhood diabetes, certain cancers, and childhood obesity. Women also stand to benefit from breastfeeding, with lowered risk of postpartum bleeding and some breast and ovarian cancers. In addition to the cost savings for women who breastfeed versus formula feed, finding ways to support women in their choice to breastfeed has numerous benefits.

The study, published in the *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics and Gynecology*, identifies breastfeeding pain as multidimensional and reveals that current [measurement tools](#) may not adequately reflect all the components of this unique type of pain, which creates challenges for health-care providers.

"Because of the various etiology and a lack of adequate measurement tools, health-care providers are at a loss for how to best assess this underrepresented type of pain," says Jackson. "Having a better understanding of how women experience this pain will allow them to provide more individualized, appropriate care, which will hopefully allow women to achieve their breastfeeding goals."

Funded by a grant from Women's College Hospital, this study, which involved assistant professor Tara Mantler from Western's School of Health Studies, and researchers from Brock University, used a mixed-methods approach to study 14 partnered and educated women living in southern Ontario with experience of breastfeeding-related [pain](#).

**More information:** Kimberley T. Jackson et al. Moving toward a better understanding of the experience and measurement of breastfeeding-related pain, *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics and Gynecology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/0167482X.2018.1518421](https://doi.org/10.1080/0167482X.2018.1518421)

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