

# Mom-to-mom phone calls lift breastfeeding rate

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An Australian study of more than 1200 women has found regular phone

calls between first time mothers and other volunteer mothers with previous breastfeeding experience may be the key to boosting national breastfeeding rates.

La Trobe University and the Royal Women's Hospital's Ringing Up about Breastfeeding Early (RUBY) trial involved more than 1000 [new mothers](#) from the Women's, Monash and Sunshine hospitals, and 230 women with personal breastfeeding experience who volunteered to become telephone support peers.

Half of the first time [mothers](#) in the study received the usual maternal health care provided to mothers when they leave hospital following birth, while the other half also received scheduled, regular phone calls from an assigned peer.

Lead researcher, Professor Della Forster from La Trobe's Judith Lumley Centre and the Royal Women's Hospital said researchers surveyed the mothers about their feeding practices when their babies reached six months.

"At the end of the two year trial we compared breastfeeding rates across both groups and found mother-to-mother proactive telephone support was an effective way to increase breastfeeding among first-time mothers," Professor Forster said.

"Seventy five per cent of the mothers who received telephone support were giving their babies some breast milk at six months of age, compared with 69 per cent of those in the usual care group.

"If applied to Australia's annual birth rate, a six per cent increase would translate to at least 180,000 more infants being breastfed for at least six months—thereby reaping all the associated benefits."

La Trobe co-researcher and lactation expert, Associate Professor Lisa Amir, said the mothers in the telephone support group were also better able to cope with breastfeeding challenges.

"Having someone to talk to, who had themselves breastfed for at least six months and was trained to listen and be empathetic, meant those who faced difficulties were more likely to persevere than give up altogether," Associate Professor Amir said.

"While Australia has a high breastfeeding initiation rate of 96 per cent, only 60 per cent of babies are receiving any breast milk at six months, and just 15 per cent are exclusively breastfed at five months. This is far below the recommended guidelines and we need to find ways to improve this."

The peer volunteer mothers who took part in the study received four hours of training, provided in conjunction with the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA). On average, the volunteers supported two mothers during the RUBY study, but some supported up to 10. The feedback from the volunteer mothers was overwhelmingly positive, and most would volunteer again.

The RUBY study follows a smaller Canadian trial and involved researchers from La Trobe's Judith Lumley Centre, the Royal Women's Hospital, the Australian Breastfeeding Association, Monash University, Deakin University and the University of Toronto.

The researchers, whose findings appear in the Lancet's online journal *EClinicalMedicine*, believe the RUBY model has potential for widespread implementation.

"Given the ease with which we recruited, trained and retained telephone support peers, we believe such as model could easily be introduced at the

[population level](#) with little cost and extra resources needed," Professor Forster said.

"Rather than replacing existing models, we think it could complement the work being done by health professionals and other agencies in promoting and supporting [breastfeeding](#)."

La Trobe University has recently launched a new trial using the same model as the RUBY study to explore if telephone peer support could also help mothers at risk of postnatal depression and anxiety.

**More information:** *EClinicalMedicine*, [DOI: 10.1016/j.eclinm.2019.02.003](#)

Provided by La Trobe University

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