

Breastfeeding associated with lower cardiovascular risk

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Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol is a key contributor to cardiovascular disease, one of the leading causes of death globally.

Breast milk has higher cholesterol than formula and research shows breastfed infants have a different synthesis and metabolism of

cholesterol than formula-fed infants, but little is known about the [long-term effects](#) of breastfeeding on cardiovascular risk factors such as LDL cholesterol.

To investigate, CUNY SPH Professor Mary Schooling and a team of researchers from the University of Hong Kong assessed the association of breastfeeding in early infancy with high cholesterol and obesity in late adolescence.

The team assessed 3,261 members of Hong Kong's "Children of 1997" birth cohort. In Hong Kong in 1997, breastfeeding was not very common and was not clearly related to mothers' education. As such, the study can better assess the effects of breastfeeding than studies from most other places where more highly educated mothers are more likely to breastfeed, making it difficult to know whether any [health benefits](#) are due to higher socio-economic position or to breastfeeding itself.

The researchers found that exclusive breastfeeding for the first three months of life was associated with lower LDL-cholesterol at about 17.5 years, regardless of body mass index and fat percentage.

"This study reveals yet another benefit of breastfeeding: helping to prevent [cardiovascular disease](#) in later life," says Schooling. "These findings are supportive of well-established public health recommendations promoting breastfeeding."

Schooling notes that further research is needed into how exposure to high cholesterol in [breast milk](#) programs cholesterol homeostasis and affects the trajectory of lipid profile in adulthood.

More information: L.L. Hui et al. Breastfeeding in Infancy and Lipid Profile in Adolescence, *Pediatrics* (2019). [DOI: 10.1542/peds.2018-3075](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-3075)

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