

# **Pregnancy-specific anxiety may impact how long a woman exclusively breastfeeds her child.**

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Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended by the World Health Organization for the first six months of life because of the benefits for both mom and baby. In Canada, approximately 32% of women meet this

recommendation.

Although [breast milk](#) is a natural first food for babies, breastfeeding is also a learned health behaviour that is influenced by many physical, social, and psychological factors. McGill University researchers Kristin Horsley, Tuong-Vi Nguyen, Blaine Ditto, and Deborah Da Costa from the Departments of Psychology and Medicine examined whether pregnancy-specific anxiety—worries or concerns related specifically to pregnancy and post-partum—might play a role in how long a woman exclusively breastfeeds her child.

The researchers used self-report questionnaire data from 412 women who took part in a [longitudinal study](#) led by Dr. Da Costa. Pregnancy-specific anxiety was assessed using a self-report questionnaire that asks women to report how worried or concerned they feel about aspects of pregnancy such as medical care, physical symptoms, bodily changes, and caring for baby. Results showed that women were more likely to feed their [infant formula](#) during the first six weeks postpartum if they experienced more pregnancy-specific anxiety in early or [late pregnancy](#).

The results, published in the *Journal of Human Lactation*, contribute to research that has identified pregnancy-specific anxiety as an important predictor of pregnancy outcomes. "Pregnancy-specific anxiety may be a signal that a woman is feeling concerned about her ability to perform pregnancy-related behaviours such as breastfeeding, especially in the face of challenges, and breastfeeding can be extremely challenging," says Horsley. For this reason, "prenatal interventions designed to support exclusive breastfeeding should incorporate strategies designed to reduce distress about unique aspects of pregnancy."

**More information:** Kristin Horsley et al. The Association Between Pregnancy-Specific Anxiety and Exclusive Breastfeeding Status Early in the Postpartum Period, *Journal of Human Lactation* (2019). [DOI:](#)

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