

# Helping health care providers support Black breastfeeding families

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Despite breastfeeding being recommended for at least two years, only 36 percent of all infants are still breastfed at their first birthday.

Black/African American mothers are least likely to initiate breastfeeding with initiation rates of only 74 percent compared to 90 percent of Asian mothers with a national average of 84 percent. Given the disparities in breastfeeding initiation, there are likely to be equivalent disparities in

breastfeeding duration.

New research from the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing (Penn Nursing) published in the journal *Breastfeeding Medicine* shares Black mothers' descriptions of their needs and experiences during [breastfeeding](#). The results can help health care providers understand how to better support Black breastfeeding families.

"The goal of this research was to hear from Black mothers who had long-term breastfeeding experiences to understand the barriers and facilitators of setting and reaching long-term breastfeeding goals," explains Stephanie N. Acquaye, Hillman Scholar at Penn Nursing and article co-author.

"This research provides insight for developing interventions to support optimal breastfeeding duration for Black families. Population-specific interventions must always be guided by the voices and experiences of members of that population. Therefore, we urge that any intervention developed accounts for variations in sociocultural factors among those who identify as Black/African American."

The study indicates that for Black families, a variety of psychological and [social factors](#) influence the desire for and achievement of breastfeeding a child beyond infancy. "Factors positively affecting achieving long-term breastfeeding goals include accessible breastfeeding education and support from community and providers," says co-author Diane L. Spatz, Ph.D., RN-BC, FAAN, Professor of Perinatal Nursing, and Helen M. Shearer Term Professor of Nutrition at Penn Nursing.

**More information:** Stephanie N. Acquaye et al, Lactation Experiences of Black Mothers Who Breastfed a Child Beyond Age One, *Breastfeeding Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.1089/bfm.2022.0284](https://doi.org/10.1089/bfm.2022.0284)

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