

Breastfed babies less likely to be given treats, sweetened drinks before 12 months: Study

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Babies who are breastfed, or partially breastfed, for more than six months are less likely to be given sugar-sweetened drinks and sweet or salty snacks before they are 12 months old, according to new research.

The latest study, led by the University of Glasgow and [published](#) in *Maternal & Child Nutrition*, looked at the links between breastfeeding and complementary feeding, otherwise known as the weaning process, where babies receive only part of their nutrients from milk and need to consume an increasingly varied diet.

The results, which used data from 2,730 parents in the Scottish Maternal Infant and Nutrition Survey, found a number of positive associations between breastfeeding for six months or more and early infant diets. Overall, researchers found that babies who received any amount of breastmilk at, and beyond 6-months old were more likely to have a diet that followed complementary feeding recommendations, including being less likely to be offered [solid foods](#) before the age of 6 months.

From 6 months old, it is recommended that babies are introduced to suitable family foods, beginning with simple purees and later progressing to more textured meals and finger-size foods. Current advice suggests offering babies green and bitter vegetables early, and to avoid adding salt and sugar to foods. Sweetened drinks, and "treats" such as chocolate or crisps, should be avoided.

In this study babies who were breastfed for six months or more were less likely to be given treats (15% versus 45% of formula-fed babies) and sweetened drinks (11% vs. 20% of formula-fed babies).

In addition, when compared to formula-fed babies, infants who were given any amount breast milk after six months were more likely to start solids at the recommended age of 6 months or older (37% vs. 66% of formula-fed babies). Researchers also found that babies who breastfed for six months were less likely to be offered commercial baby food (31% vs. 53% of formula-fed babies). These associations all remained even after the researchers adjusted for sociodemographic factors.

Of the 2,730 surveyed in the Scottish Maternal Infant and Nutrition Survey, 20% of babies were solely infant formula-fed while 48% continued breastfeeding beyond six months. Despite starting the weaning process later, infants who were breastfed after 6 months-old ate the same number of food groups and meals as formula-fed babies, and were just as likely to self-feed both purees and fingers foods.

The research group, led by Dr. Ada Garcia, has been studying the impacts of commercial baby foods for more than a decade. The group's work has focused on areas including the quality of commercial baby foods, finding a large number of these products are high in sugar, and as a result may promote a sweet tooth in infants and encourage snacking on processed foods.

Dr. Garcia, lead author of the study from the University of Glasgow, said, "In this study we were able to observe that diet inequalities start as early as 6–12 months old. This is worrying, because eating habits are developed and established early in life, and it can be harder to change them later on.

"Our research suggests that continuing to promote breastfeeding, where possible, may help to protecting infants' health, along with helping to establish healthy dietary behaviors from a young age."

More information: Ada L. Garcia et al, Associations between breastfeeding duration and adherence to complementary feeding recommendations in Scotland, *Maternal & Child Nutrition* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/mcn.13633](https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.13633)

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