

Latch On Study: Breastfeeding among mothers who are overweight or obese can be significantly increased

February 14 2024, by David Kearns



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Breastfeeding rates among women who are overweight or obese can be increased by providing education and support, according to new

research.

Irish [breastfeeding](#) rates are among the lowest worldwide, with only 44% of Irish newborns receiving breastmilk only on discharge from maternity services, and some groups of women appear more vulnerable than others to not breastfeeding.

These include those with diabetes in pregnancy, women who are overweight or obese, and women from poorer backgrounds.

A new study [published](#) in *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology* addresses the barriers to breastfeeding experienced by these women and has found that through education and support [intervention](#), breastfeeding rates in women who are overweight or obese can be significantly increased.

The Latch On Study was a randomized controlled trial carried out by the UCD Perinatal Research Center at the National Maternity Hospital and three other Irish hospitals, Wexford General Hospital, St Luke's General Hospital, Kilkenny and Midland Regional Hospital Mullingar.

It was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of a multicomponent breastfeeding education and support intervention in women who are overweight or obese, and enrolled 225 first time mothers with a BMI of 25 or higher.

These women were randomly assigned to either the multicomponent intervention group, or a control group that received the normal lactation support provided to all women attending the maternity hospitals for the birth of their babies.

The study found that at three months postpartum, breastfeeding rates were 68.7% in the intervention group and 62.1% in the control group.

While this difference was not statistically significant, proving that multicomponent intervention is not more effective than the usual care, both groups had significantly higher breastfeeding rates than the national average—which sees only 4 out of 10 women who are overweight or obese breastfeeding.

The study also found women in the [control group](#) accessed significantly more private lactation support than the intervention group, suggesting that when a woman is motivated to breastfeed, they will seek the support they need.

"Our results highlight the importance of providing comprehensive education and support to women who intend to breastfeed, regardless of whether they participate in a formal intervention," said Associate Professor Sharleen O'Reilly, Registered Dietitian and lead author.

Professor Fionnuala McAuliffe, Consultant Obstetrician and senior author added, "Women living with [obesity](#) and overweight can achieve really positive breastfeeding outcomes—our rates of breastfeeding at three months were higher than the Irish average."

The study's findings have important implications for health care providers and policymakers, and suggest that all women should be encouraged to breastfeed and be offered comprehensive education and support.

In terms of maternal health, breastfeeding is associated with supporting women to better heart health, better pregnancy spacing, and a lower risk of breast cancer and diabetes later in life.

For [infant health](#), breastfeeding is associated with less sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and inner ear infections, and less obesity and type 2 diabetes when they are older.

More information: Sharleen L. O'Reilly et al, Multicomponent perinatal breastfeeding support in women with BMI >25: The Latch On multi-centre randomised trial, *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/1471-0528.17782](https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0528.17782)

Provided by University College Dublin

Citation: Latch On Study: Breastfeeding among mothers who are overweight or obese can be significantly increased (2024, February 14) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-02-latch-breastfeeding-mothers-overweight-obese.html>

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