

Moms need help to overcome breastfeeding worries, study says

July 11 2013

More support is needed to help women overcome doubts in the hope that they will breastfeed their babies for longer, says a University of Alberta nutrition researcher.

A study conducted by the University of Alberta in Canada found that new moms are weaning their infants early instead of feeding them just [breast milk](#) for the first six months of life, said Anna Farmer, an associate professor in the Department of Agricultural, Food and Nutritional Science and the Centre for Health Promotion Studies. That falls below recommendations made by the World Health Organization and endorsed in 2004 by Health Canada and the Canadian Paediatric Society.

"Women's attitudes towards [breastfeeding](#) even before the baby is born can predict whether or not moms are going to breastfeed, so it is important that everything from the [home environment](#) to [public spaces](#) supports nursing moms," said Farmer. "We need to address their concerns and misconceptions about breastfeeding, especially young first-time mothers."

Farmer and her colleagues surveyed 402 pregnant [women](#) at three months postpartum and 300 of them again at the six-month mark, and found that though almost 99 per cent of the women started out breastfeeding their babies, only 54 per cent were still exclusively breastfeeding three months after [giving birth](#). That number dropped again to 15 per cent by six months, in line with the national average,

which is also low for breastfeeding.

The study, published recently in *BMC Pediatrics*, found that 54 per cent of the women had neutral attitudes towards breastfeeding, as did 53 per cent of the mothers who fed their infants formula during the first six months after birth. More than half of the women in the study stopped breastfeeding because of their perceptions of milk inadequacy or other problems.

The study also found that women with post-graduate university degrees were 37 per cent more likely to breastfeed exclusively for six months as opposed to those without a degree. As well, mothers with previous children were more likely to breastfeed for longer.

Farmer advises new moms to breastfeed for as long as possible, even on a partial basis. "Some breast milk is better than none."

Farmer hopes the research findings will help doctors, nurses and other health practitioners provide advice to pregnant women with a focus on what may or may not be known about exclusive, long-term breastfeeding, to help promote the practice beyond the first few months after birth.

The study also recommends more policy provision for nursing rooms in public facilities. "The social environment needs to be more open. Women need spaces where they can breastfeed quietly without feeling ashamed," Farmer said.

Provided by University of Alberta

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