

Early parenting routines may harm breastfeeding

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(Medical Xpress)—New collaborative research between Newcastle and Swansea University indicates that mothers who choose to follow strict parenting routines for sleep and feeding in early infancy are less likely to breastfeed their baby or to stop in the first few weeks.

Dr Amy Brown from the College of Human and Health Sciences at Swansea University and Dr Bronia Arnott from the Institute of Health and Society at Newcastle University explored the relationship between early parenting behaviour and [breastfeeding](#) duration. The research surveyed 508 mothers with a baby aged under one year old, examining behaviour such as use of routines for [sleep](#) and feeding, beliefs about responding quickly to their infants cries, feelings of anxiety about their baby, and breastfeeding duration. The researchers found that mothers who report adopting a responsive approach to early parenting, following the baby's cues for feeding and sleeping and responding quickly to infant cries, are much more likely to start breastfeeding and continue to do so. Alternatively following strict routines was associated with stopping breastfeeding in the first few weeks.

Dr Brown said: "There are many trends in parenting that encourage new [parents](#) to follow a routine for sleep or feeding or not to respond quickly to their infants cries but the impact upon infant development has not been explored. Parents may believe that following a routine could encourage babies to sleep for longer or to be more settled but there is very little research behind these suggestions. Our data is the first to show that a strict parenting routine may be incompatible with or discourage breastfeeding'.

Breast feeding

Dr Arnott said: 'We know that breastfeeding is best established with an infant-led feeding approach where [babies](#) are fed on demand. Using a strict

routine for sleep or feeding, or not keeping the baby close may mean that cues for feeding are missed and milk supply is affected. This could mean that mums perceive that they are not producing enough milk and believe that they need to top-up with formula or stop breastfeeding altogether.

Dr Arnott added: "Mums may believe they should follow such strict routines so that their baby will sleep through the night or so that they will have a 'good baby' who is 'settled', but it is normal and healthy for a young infant to wake frequently and want to be held."

Dr Brown who is also Programme Director for the MSc in Child Public Health added 'Our findings are significant as they suggest that a parent led routine can affect the success and continuance of breastfeeding. New parents should be aware that parenting philosophies that encourage the use of strict routine and infant independence are largely scientifically untested and could be incompatible with breastfeeding. However, we also know that caring for a newborn infant can be very tiring. More research is needed to explore the outcomes of parenting routines and behaviours and to understand how best health professionals can support new mothers at this time.'

The paper has been published in *Plos One*.

More information: Brown A, Arnott B (2014) Breastfeeding Duration and Early Parenting Behaviour: The Importance of an Infant-Led, Responsive Style. *PLoS ONE* 9(2): e83893. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0083893](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0083893)

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