

## Asthma and breastfeeding

Breastfeeding your newborn baby for at least the first six months can significantly reduce your child's risk of developing childhood asthma and other allergies. Around one in nine Australian children has been diagnosed with asthma.

### Factors in the rise of childhood asthma

Australia has one of the highest asthma rates in the world. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that more than 2.2 million Australians are affected by asthma. Some of the factors that may have contributed to the rise in childhood asthma over the past decade include:

- Increased exposure to viral infection while young
- Changes in lifestyle
- Exposure to house dust mite
- Not enough oily fish in the Australian diet
- Less women breastfeeding their newborn babies.

### A six year research study

The rate of breastfeeding in Australia has declined, mirroring the rise in childhood asthma. Whether breastfeeding offers a child any protection against developing asthma and other allergies has long been controversial in the breast-versus-bottle debate.

Researchers in Western Australia tracked over 2,000 children from birth to six years of age and found that breastfeeding for at least six months significantly reduces a baby's risk of later developing asthma and other allergies.

There has been further research done overseas on asthma and breastfeeding with inconsistent findings. Researchers agree that further investigation needs to be done on the relationship between cow's milk allergy from bottle feeding and breastfeeding.

### A skill to be learned

Breastfeeding is a learned skill and it may take time for the mother and baby to master it. Some women give up trying to breastfeed because they are worried their baby might not be getting enough milk during the learning and establishing process. If you are having trouble breastfeeding your baby, there are lactation experts available to help you.

### Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Australian Breastfeeding Association Helpline Tel. 1800 mum 2 mum (1800 686 2 686)
- Hospitals – The Royal Women's Hospital Tel. (03) 8345 2000 or Mercy Hospital for Women Tel. (03) 9270 2222
- The Asthma Foundation of Victoria Tel. 1800 645 130 or (03) 9326 7088
- Paediatrician
- Maternal and child health nurse or midwife

### Things to remember

- Approximately one in nine children in Australia has been diagnosed with asthma.

- Breastfeeding for at least the first six months can significantly reduce your baby's risk of developing childhood asthma and other allergies.
- Breastfeeding is a learned skill and it may take time for you and your baby to master the techniques involved.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Asthma Foundation of Victoria

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