



Press Release

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Babies breastfed for longer gain emotional benefits, study shows

Children who are breastfed for three months or more develop fewer behavioural difficulties than those who are not, research suggests.

They are less prone to social and emotional setbacks such as bouts of anxiety, struggles forming friendships, or problems with concentration, the study found.

This was the case even allowing for other influencing factors such as maternal education, maternal psychological distress and family socio-economic status.

Babies being breastfed for less than three months has been linked to a range of behavioural difficulties but previous studies – mostly focused on early childhood – have been inconclusive.

This new research – the first to track behaviour into adolescence – offers fresh evidence that breastfeeding is linked to later behavioural development.

The study, led by the Universities of Edinburgh and Lancaster, is published in the journal *Archives of Disease in Childhood*.

Researchers mapped the long-term effect of breastfeeding as a baby on children's behaviour at ages 3, 5, 7, 11 and 14. They did so by analysing questionnaires about children's strengths and difficulties that had been completed by parents and teachers.

Data was taken from the internationally respected Millennium Cohort Study, which is tracking the lives of nearly 20,000 people born in the UK in 2000-02.

Some 11,000 people – children, parents and teachers – contributed to this latest research.

Lead author Lydia Speyer, of the University of Edinburgh's School of [Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences](#), said: "The positive impact of breastfeeding on children's physical development is well known but, the effect on their social and emotional development is less understood.

"Having identified that there are potential behavioural benefits, our study strengthens the case for public health strategies that promote breastfeeding, where possible."

The paper (doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2020-31903) can be accessed at: <https://bit.ly/3eurLwD>.

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