

Lactation and Subsequent Maternal Visceral Adiposity

This research was presented at the 50th Annual American Heart Association Council on Epidemiology and Prevention in San Francisco, CA, March 5, 2010. It garnered a significant amount of attention at the conference and has gained both national and international press recognition. News coverage regarding this study has been published on national (MSN.com, yahoo.com) and international (South Africa, Indonesia, Ukraine, Italy, and Vietnam) news websites.

Mothers who breastfeed less likely to retain belly fat later in life than mothers who bottle feed

Researchers found that mothers who breastfed all of their children had no more belly fat than women who had never given birth.

Prior studies have shown that belly fat (or “visceral adiposity”) increases the risk of heart attacks and strokes, and women are known to gain visceral fat during pregnancy. It had not been known, however, which women are more likely to retain this dangerous type of fat and if breastfeeding makes a difference.

Researchers looked at the association between lactation, or breastfeeding, and visceral adiposity in a sample of 351 middle-aged U.S. women. The researchers found that:

- Premenopausal/early peri-menopausal mothers who had never breastfed had 42 percent more belly fat; a 6.15 centimeter larger waist circumference; and 4.0 percent greater waist-hip ratio than women who had never given birth.
- Premenopausal/early peri-menopausal mothers who did not breastfeed had 28 percent more belly fat; a 6.49 centimeter larger waist circumference; and a 3.0 percent greater waist-hip ratio than mothers who breastfed all of their children.

These relationships were not seen among late peri-menopausal/postmenopausal women.

These results may help explain previous findings that women who do not breastfeed their children are at increased risk of developing diabetes, metabolic syndrome and cardiovascular disease.