

Breastfeeding may reduce socioeconomic-based differences in children's physical & mental health

Two studies using CHILd data have found that breastfeeding may reduce socioeconomic-based differences in children's health.

The first study found that children in families of lower socioeconomic status (SES) tend to follow a different health path than children in families of higher SES: they typically run a higher risk of developing asthma and overweight or obesity, and of experiencing behavioural challenges by age five.

PROTECTION THROUGH THE GUT

The research, published in *Cell Reports Medicine*, also found that breastfeeding, through its positive influence on the infant gut microbiome, appears to provide protection against these same risks.

Using data from 2,752 CHILd families, the team examined over three dozen factors in relation to the infant gut microbiota and four childhood health outcomes linked to chronic disease.

Higher SES was significantly associated with broad differences across exposures, the composition of the infant gut microbiota, and a lower risk of asthma, overweight or obesity, and behavioural challenges at age five.

When the researchers examined which of these differences helped explain the effect of SES on infant development, breastfeeding stood out as a key factor. It was linked to protection of the infant

microbiota, including beneficial bacteria, and those benefits extended into early childhood, including lower chronic disease risk at age five. These protective effects were especially strong among children from lower-SES families.

In the second study, published in *Frontiers in Public Health*, CHILd researchers found a stronger link between breastfeeding and improved child behavior scores among children living in households of lower SES.

Using data from over 2,000 children in CHILd, the researchers analyzed measures of breastfeeding duration and breastfeeding exclusivity, as well as child behavior problems as assessed at five years of age.

NARROWING THE GAP

The researchers found that on average, children growing up in lower SES households had more behavior problems than those in higher SES households. But the difference narrowed when children in lower SES families were breastfed exclusively for six months and for a longer period overall.

Together, these findings highlight the positive role for breastfeeding toward reducing inequities in children's health related to SES.

Because those in lower SES settings tend to experience greater barriers to breastfeeding, these findings also point to the need for policies and programs to reduce these barriers, offering more children a healthier start in life.

Breastfeeding may reduce socioeconomic-based differences in children's health



- Lower risk** of chronic disease or behavioral challenges among children of lower socioeconomic status (SES) who are breastfed
- Less difference** in behavioral problems between lower and higher SES kids when lower SES kids are breastfed exclusively for 6 months or breastfed longer overall
- Breastfeeding protects** the infant microbiome, including beneficial bacteria
- Breastfeeding reduces** risk of asthma, overweight or obesity, and behavioural challenges especially among lower SES kids
- Policies and programs** are needed for lower SES families to reduce barriers to breastfeeding, giving more children a healthier start

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