

Media Release
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australian
breastfeeding
association

BREASTFEEDING and ALLERGY STUDY FLAWED

Let's be clear — breastfeeding does not cause allergy. On the contrary, most studies show breastfeeding protects against allergy.

A study published yesterday in the *Journal of Clinical Allergy and Immunology* showed reduced risk of asthma, eczema and food allergies in children aged seven and under who were breastfed for three months. The children also had less episodes of bacterial or viral infection. Interest however focused on the adult onset of allergy, which appeared to be linked to 'exclusive breastfeeding' for three months.

The question that needs to be asked is — how exclusive was the breastfeeding? The studied group of people were all born in 1961. Giving every newborn baby a nightly feed of artificial formula was routine in the 1960s. This was often without the mother's permission or knowledge. One exposure to non-human milk can sensitise a baby's immature gut and make them more prone to allergies.

In a West Australian study by world-renowned researcher Dr Wendy Oddy, it was shown that introducing artificial formula before **four** months increased the risk of asthma by 20%.

"Exclusive breastfeeding is very important. Giving any formula before four months also doubles a baby's chances of being admitted to hospital for chest infections and decreases brain function," Dr Oddy said.

The increase in allergies has happened in recent times and also at the same time as the move towards artificial infant feeding. Yet the good news from this study is that even a small amount of breastfeeding gives such important protection to children.

"Given the many benefits breastfeeding provides, it should continue to be promoted as the best way to feed infants — exclusively for the first six months and then to two years and beyond along with solid foods." said Dr Oddy.

According to the Australian Breastfeeding Association, there is nothing in this study to justify calling for any changes to the recommendations on breastfeeding. The causes of allergy and asthma are complex. Breastfeeding mothers should be reassured that one study is not a reason to ignore a large body of evidence that shows breastfeeding is the best way to feed an infant.

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