

Breastfeeding study dispels sagging myth

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Nursing mothers needn't worry. A new study shows that breastfeeding does not increase breast sagging. University of Kentucky plastic surgeon Dr. Brian Rinker and his colleagues conducted the study with patients at UK HealthCare Cosmetic Surgery Associates. The study found that breastfeeding does not adversely affect breast shape.

"A lot of times, if a woman comes in for a breast lift or a breast augmentation, she'll say 'I want to fix what breastfeeding did to my breasts,'" Rinker said. As a result, Rinker decided to find out if breast sagging was a direct result of breastfeeding.

Rinker and his colleagues interviewed 132 women who had come to UK for a breast lift or augmentation between 1998 and 2006. The women were, on average, 39 years old; 93 percent had had at least one pregnancy, and most of the mothers—58 percent-- had breastfed at least one child. Additionally, the research team evaluated the patients' medical history, body mass index, pre-pregnancy bra cup size, and smoking status.

The results showed no difference in the degree of breast ptosis (TOE-sis)—the medical term for sagging of the breast--for those women who breastfed and those who didn't. However, researchers found that several other factors did affect breast sagging, including age, the number of pregnancies, and whether the patient smoked.

"Smoking breaks down a protein in the skin called elastin, which gives youthful skin its elastic appearance and supports the breast... so it would make sense that it would have an adverse effect on the breasts," Rinker concluded.

Rinker presented the findings of the study this week at the American Society of Plastic Surgeons conference in Baltimore.

Source: University of Kentucky

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