

Breastfeeding tied to stronger maternal response to baby's cry

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A new study from the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* finds that mothers who feed their babies breast milk exclusively, as opposed to formula, are more likely to bond emotionally with their child during the first few months after delivery. The breastfeeding mothers surveyed for the study showed greater responses to their infant's cry in brain regions related to caregiving behavior and empathy than mothers who relied upon formula as the baby's main food source. This is the first paper to examine the underlying neurobiological mechanisms as a function of breastfeeding, and to connect brain activity with maternal behaviors among human mothers.

The fMRI-based findings suggest that breastfeeding and factors associated with breastfeeding, such as high levels of hormones ([oxytocin](#), prolactin), stress, and culture may all play an important role for mothers' [brain activity](#) and parenting behaviours during the early postpartum period. The research shows that up to three or four months after delivery some of the [brain regions](#) originally observed at one month postpartum (amygdala, putamen, globus pallidus, and superior frontal gyrus) continued to activate and were correlated with maternal, sensitive behavior among the same group of mothers.

The findings highlight the dramatic relationship between breastfeeding, brain activity and parenting behaviours during the early postpartum period. Lead researcher Dr. Pilyoung Kim, "It is important for loved ones to support mothers and help them cope with challenges related to breastfeeding and parenting during this period. Mothers unable to breastfeed may benefit from extra encouragement to engage in sensitive, caring interactions with baby."

Provided by Wiley

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