Study: Infant carrier use linked to longer breastfeeding

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

Using an infant carrier may help improve the length of time women breastfeed their babies, according to a new study.

Breastfeeding has been linked to health benefits for both women and children. The AAP recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continued breastfeeding with complementary foods until the child is at least 1 year. However, many families fall short of these recommendations.

Studies have found skin-to-skin contact with an infant immediately after birth increases breastfeeding rates, so researchers sought to test whether infant carriers could have a similar impact. They studied 100 low-income pregnant women in California, most of whom were Latinx, between February 2018 and June 2019. They published the findings today in "An Infant Carrier Intervention and Breastfeeding Duration: A Randomized Controlled Trial" (Little EE, et al. Pediatrics. June 30, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-049717).

At 30 weeks’ gestation, half of the women were randomly assigned to receive an ergonomic infant carrier, and the other half was assigned to a control group. Both groups had similar demographics and intentions to breastfeed. They were surveyed periodically over a six-month period about breastfeeding and infant carrier use.

There were no significant differences in breastfeeding rates at six weeks or three months postpartum. However, at six months, 68% of the group with infant carriers was feeding their child breastmilk either directly or expressed compared to 40% of the control group. At that time, the intervention group was using the carriers just under two hours a day on average.

"More time in close physical proximity to infants may facilitate responsiveness to infants’ early hunger cues," authors wrote. "… Increased physical contact may also indirectly impact breastfeeding by facilitating bonding."

The findings confirm those of a similar study of Italian women published in 2012. Authors called for additional studies to look at larger, more diverse populations, including Black and Indigenous communities.

Resources

- AAP policy on breastfeeding
- Practice tools and educational materials for pediatricians and parents
- Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org on breastfeeding