

13 May 2008

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Courier Journal

Breastfeeding Keeps Rheumatism at Bay

13 months of breastfeeding reduce the risk by 50%

Breastfeeding is good not only for the baby, but it is also beneficial for the new moms. A new Swedish research published in the *Annals of Rheumatic Diseases* shows that women who breastfeed for at least 13 months reduce their chance of rheumatoid arthritis by 50%, compared to those who have never breastfed. Comparatively, women breastfeeding for 1 to 12 months displayed a risk decrease of 25%. The team at Malmo University Hospital conducted all analyses on a group made of 136 women with rheumatoid arthritis and 544 healthy ones. The study also found that simply having children and not breastfeeding had no protective effect against rheumatoid arthritis. Rheumatoid arthritis affects about 400,000 people only in UK, and women are twice more likely to develop the disease. Breastfeeding boosts the levels of oxytocin, a hormone that makes the levels of stress hormone plummet, decreasing blood pressure and inducing a state of wellbeing. At the same time, it boosts the levels of prolactin, a hormone that increases the activity of the immune system and simultaneously the risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis, which is an auto-immune condition. At least on short term. "In the past, we have shown that breastfeeding was a risk factor for developing rheumatoid arthritis in a small group of women soon after giving birth to their first child. This is slightly different in that it looks at longer-term risk. One explanation could be that women who breastfeed may lead healthier lifestyles than women who don't, but we don't know the mechanisms that would explain this fully," Professor Alan Silman, medical director of the Arthritis Research Campaign, told BBC News. In western countries, less than 1% of the women breastfeed exclusively for the first 6 months. Even if 76% of all British mothers start out by breastfeeding, most of them switch to formula milk within weeks. The research also focused on the link between the contraceptive pill and a possible decreased risk of rheumatoid arthritis. The analysis found no effect induced by oral contraceptives on lowering the risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis.