

Breastfeeding halves mother's arthritis risk

Breastfeeding has unplanned benefits like protecting nursing mothers from rheumatoid arthritis, according to a new study.

The study found that women who had breastfed for 13 months or more were half as likely to get rheumatoid arthritis as those who had never breastfed. Those who had breastfed for one to 12 months were 25 percent less likely to get the disease.

The study compared 136 women suffering from rheumatoid arthritis with 544 women of a similar age who were healthy.

The proportion of women breast-feeding for more than six months has increased dramatically over the past 30 years.

The study concluded that it was difficult to say whether there was a connection between higher rates of breast feeding and a corresponding fall in the number of women affected by rheumatoid arthritis, but that the results of the study provided yet another reason why women should continue breast feeding.

Interestingly, the study found that oral contraceptives, suspected of protecting against rheumatoid arthritis because they contain hormones raised during pregnancy, did not have the same effect as breastfeeding.

Also, having children and not breastfeeding also did not seem to work.

Findings of the study have appeared online ahead of the print version in the *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases*.

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