

Breastfeeding Intention

Fact Sheet

One of the many decisions that a parent makes for their newborn is how to feed them. This is an important decision, as early childhood nutrition is a determinant of health, especially infant health, and can impact long-term health outcomes in individual lives. The global recommendation for infant health is that infants are exclusively breastfed for six months because breastfeeding supports healthier outcomes for infants and toddlers.

Despite the recommendation, breastfeeding intention and duration numbers remain low (25.6%), even lower among black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) families. Black families have had the lowest breastfeeding rates since 1960, leading to poorer health outcomes in babies in BIPOC communities than in White communities⁸. Factors that influence a woman's intention to initiate breastfeeding after birth differs from factors that influence her ability to sustain breastfeeding. Studies have proven that families who experience breastfeeding promotion before birth are likely to have more intentions of breastfeeding, initiate breastfeeding, and continue breastfeeding to at least six weeks.

Breastfeeding intention is an important predictor of breastfeeding initiation and duration as well as a measure of exclusive breastfeeding. Based on this fact sheet, interventions centering on breastfeeding promotion and education should be prioritized in maternal and child health.

Prenatal Engagement and Breastfeeding Intention

- Breastfeeding promotion during the prenatal period may increase a family's intention to breastfeed and duration periods.
- Unsupportive health care professionals and facilities are barriers to the relationship between BIPOC families and breastfeeding.
- Prenatal breastfeeding education was addressed in only 29% of visits for less than 40 seconds.
- Negative assumptions from health care professionals of BIPOC families lead to poorer supportive services.
- Formula-fed infants had similar health outcomes as breastfed infants if their mothers intended to breastfeed.
- Among infants born in 2016, 74% of Black families reported initiating breastfeeding compared to 87% of White families.
- Women with increased concern about their body shape or weight are less likely to intend to breastfeed.
- Breastfeeding mothers are more likely to be well-educated, white, married, and have higher incomes than non-breastfeeding mothers.
- In the U.S., Latina families are likely to initiate breastfeeding, but only 18% practice exclusive breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding Duration to 6 weeks

- Unsupportive workplaces and lack of parental leave are barriers to breastfeeding intention.
 - Only about 51% of U.S. employers have lactation support on campus.
 - On average, parents who do not work breastfeed longer than parents who do work.
 - Parents who had to return to work full-time in less than three months have fewer breastfeeding intentions than parents who do not have to return to work as early.
 - Among infants born in 2016, 39% of Black families reported exclusively breastfeeding through 3 months compared to 53% of White families.
 - Breastfeeding intention is a predictor for breastfeeding duration to at least six weeks. Parents who reported breastfeeding intention had 2.75 times the odds of feeding to 10 weeks.
 - Even though more Black families intend to breastfeed, they also lack the support needed to continue for longer durations.
 - Women with lower confidence were more likely to stop breastfeeding within 1-week postpartum.
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RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ **Increase workplace supports for breastfeeding for all working families, and particularly those in labor and service jobs, including paid family leave.**
- ▶ **Increase prenatal engagement and support from health care professionals and in hospitals.**
- ▶ **Develop community support initiatives for breastfeeding families, especially in BIPOC communities that maintain cultural practices.**
- ▶ **Invest in community-rooted breastfeeding peer counselors.**
- ▶ **Hospitals and policymakers should limit in-hospital formula feeding and increase breastfeeding promotion.**
- ▶ **Integrate doulas into maternal care, universally.**

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