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Learn more!

Does Breastfeeding Help to Lose Baby Weight?
Something that tends to be on many women's minds after having a baby is "How do I lose the baby weight?" I want to preface this post with the caveat that I do not think that it necessarily SHOULD be a topic on our minds at that time, but it is very common for it to be something we think about. It certainly rolled around in the back of my own mind after having my son last year! Breastfeeding is often talked about as one thing that can really help us to lose the baby weight. But is that really true? Research on Breastfeeding

It is important to realize that studying breastfeeding is incredibly difficult to do. It is a very individual experience in many ways. How exclusively a woman breastfeeds, and for how long, are affected by a multitude of factors. Even if a woman meant to breastfeed exclusively for a certain amount of time, things may happen that prevent that. Since every woman's experience is so different, it's difficult to do. It is a very individual difficult to categorize people into experience in many ways. How groups in order to study them well. Exclusively a woman breastfeeds, and for how long, are affected by a

There are also a TON of other overall lifestyle choices, so isolating confounding variables that come the breastfeeding isn't really possible. Additionally, the research breastfeeding as ONE thing that's observational, not experimental, different in a mother's life, making it looks different.
Does Breastfeeding Help to Lose Baby Weight?

That said, there is research out there on this, along with the baseline knowledge that breastfeeding burns calories. It takes energy to produce and distribute milk. So, in theory, if a woman was to eat the exact same amount that she did before pregnancy, and she's now burning more energy by breastfeeding, then yes, she would be in a calorie deficit and should lose weight. But is life ever that simple (especially for a new mom)?

An overview of what we know

When looking at the research on breastfeeding and weight loss, the term they use is actually Postpartum Weight Retention (PPWR). It's a measure of how much Gestational Weight Gain (GWG) is kept on after the baby comes. Studies look to see if breastfeeding (or any other factor) is associated with a decrease in PPWR (meaning less weight is retained).

Studies are conflicting. Some show that breastfeeding is associated with reduced PPWR.1–3 Other studies don’t show an association.4 (Remember, correlation does not equal causation. Just because some studies show that women who breastfeed have less weight retention, it doesn't necessarily mean that the breastfeeding "caused" the weight loss.) Even studies that compile the data from a bunch of other studies can't find a consistent answer. Remember what I wrote about on the first page—there are a TON of other confounding variables that come into play. It's hard to isolate breastfeeding as ONE thing that's different in a mother's life, making it difficult to say conclusively that it's...
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A few things do seem to be related to PPWR though:

1 – How much weight was gained in pregnancy (GWG). It makes sense that the more weight a woman gains, the more weight will have to be lost to return to the pre-pregnancy weight. When we gain a lot of weight, it is understandably harder to lose all of it, and thus these women with higher GWG tend to have higher PPWR.

2, 3, 5–8

2 – Lifestyle plays a big role. I don’t think anyone should be surprised by this. A woman who has healthy lifestyle behaviors is able to reduce her PPWR better than someone who does not have healthy habits.

9, 10

Specifically, dietary interventions have a bigger impact than exercise interventions. Fat loss happens in the kitchen!

3 – Higher pre-pregnancy BMIs is associated with higher PPWR, as well as a lower likelihood of breastfeeding (or having less success in initiating breastfeeding). It’s possible that the breastfeeding difficulties this population experiences could be related to the increased PPWR.

When we boil this down, it actually ends up being a pretty common sense answer:

Breastfeeding is wonderful, but it's not magic. Weight loss is weight loss. Breastfeeding can certainly help us lose some of the baby weight because it burns more calories than not breastfeeding.

However, healthy behaviors are still king. Just like the saying “You can’t make gravy without milk.” Breastfeeding can certainly help us lose some of the baby weight because it burns more calories than not breastfeeding.

Research on Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is associated with higher PPWR, as well as a lower likelihood of breastfeeding. It is an incredibly individual experience in many ways. How exclusively a woman breastfeeds and for how long are affected by a multitude of factors. Even if a woman meant to breastfeed exclusively for a certain amount of time, things may happen that prevent that. Since every woman’s experience is so different, it’s difficult to categorize people into groups in order to study them well.

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It is important to realize that studying breastfeeding is incredibly difficult to do. It is a very individual experience in many ways. How exclusively a woman breastfeeds, and for how long, are affected by a multitude of factors. Even if a woman meant to breastfeed exclusively for a certain amount of time, things may happen that prevent her from doing so, regardless of when in our and for how long, are affected by a multitude of factors. Even if a woman meant to breastfeed, weight, regardless of when in our lives we're looking to do it, we need to address overall lifestyle, habits, skills, and behaviors.

Any mamas out there want to share their experience? I'd love to hear from you. And please share this post with the other moms you know!

References

There are also a TON of other confounding variables that come into play. For example, there are all sorts of different reasons why a mother's lifestyle might affect their weight retention, and it's difficult to know what to do about all of them.
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Research on Breastfeeding and Weight Retention

It is incredibly difficult to do studies on breastfeeding because it is an incredibly individual experience in many ways. How exclusively a woman breastfeeds, and for how long, are affected by a multitude of factors. Even if a woman meant to breastfeed exclusively for a certain amount of time, things may happen that prevent that. Since every woman's experience is so different, it's difficult to categorize people into groups in order to study them well.

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Hi, I'm Kara!

Welcome to Raising Nutrition! I'm a mom with a Master's degree in Nutrition, and I'm here to help you teach your kids (and yourself) how to be happy and healthy eaters for life. Read more on my About page!

Resource Pages!
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Healthy Skills and Practical Tips

Healthy and Happy Mindset

Pregnancy and Postpartum Nutrition

Feeding Kids Well

Recipes

Want to Stop Dieting For Good?

Diet Mindset Makeover is the book that can get you there!

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Healthy and Happy Mindset

- Improve your body image
- Stop viewing foods as good or bad
- Learn a flexible and sane strategy to eat well without all the food rules
- End emotional eating
- Give your kids the gift of a healthy relationship with food from the get-go!

All this and more is inside Diet Mindset Makeover. Check it out on AMAZON!!

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Healthy Skills and Practical Tips

- Reduce sugar
- Cut back on dairy
- Eat more plant-based meals
- Enjoy more whole foods
- Avoid processed and refined foods

Research

Breastfeeding

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Pregnancy and Postpartum Nutrition

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Babycare moms talk about losing those leftover pregnancy pounds and feeling good about your shape after having a baby. Postpartum fashion: Styles that work best with your new shape. Does breastfeeding help you lose weight? Serena Williams doesn't think so – here's what scientists say. Breastfeeding is widely touted as a means of weight loss, but even though it's a hungry business as far as the body is concerned, there are several reasons why simply sitting back and letting baby suck away the calories often doesn't cut it. On average, women lay down 4kg (9lb) of fat during pregnancy and to lose each kilogram, they will need to create a 7,700-calorie deficit. Exclusive breastfeeding eats up about 595 calories a day during the first two months of a baby's life, increasing to 695 calories a day as the baby gets bigger.