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Breast milk best for infant brain development

A Dutch study provides further evidence that breast milk is better than formula for brain development.

In a study of 526 children traced for nine years, scientists found that those who were breast-fed for at least three weeks were half as likely to suffer from neurologic abnormalities, such as coordination problems, compared with those who got formula.

"The findings suggest that the type of feeding during the first weeks of life may have a role in the later neurobehavioural condition," said Dr. Caren Lanting, one of the investigators at the University of Groningen.

The research, to be published in *The Lancet* medical journal, is the latest in a series of studies suggesting that something in breast milk is good for the brain. Previous studies

have linked breast milk to intelligence. This study focuses on neurological development, including reflexes and basic movement abilities.

Skeptics wondered if some of the benefits attributed to breast milk were in fact due to the mother's motivation, education or bonding during feedings. In the new study, investigators accounted for these variables.

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REFERENCE: Lanting, C.I., Fidler, V., Huisman, M., Touwen, B.C.L. and E.R. Boersma: Neurological differences between 9-year-old children fed breast-milk or formula-milk as babies. *The Lancet* **344**(#8933): 1,319-1,322 (1994). [DC Library call number: PER R31.L3]

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