

PRESS RELEASE

New evidence that mother’s milk offers unique prevention for asthma, a disease with no cure

In Switzerland, one in 10 children and one in 14 adults suffer from asthmaⁱ, a disease with no known cure. Now, a pioneering, multidisciplinary study offers new scientific evidence that breast milk can prevent asthma.

- 235 million people suffer from asthma worldwide, and 250,000 die prematurely each year
- No known cure exists for the disease
- New, one-of-a-kind scientific study shows that breast milk offers unique early asthma prevention

Baar, Switzerland/Paris, France – 26 February 2018. No cure exists for asthma, a disease that causes 250,000 deaths each year and affects 235 million people worldwide, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).ⁱⁱ March 22–23, at the 13th International Breastfeeding and Lactation Symposium in Paris, Asst. Prof. Meghan Azad will discuss new evidence from a first-of-its-kind, multidisciplinary study, which shows that mother’s milk can prevent asthma.

Hospitalisation, missed school, a lifetime of reduced activity, and even death

Asthma “attacks” squeeze the airways and cause difficulty breathing. In the film Hitch, quirky romantic lead Kevin James throws his asthma inhaler to the curb, before kissing the woman of his dreams. In reality, inhalers are more than psychological crutches, and asthma sufferers depend on those and other daily treatments to help them breathe another day. Lifelong asthma sufferers get less sleep, experience more daytime exhaustion, are less active, and miss more work than people without the disease.ⁱⁱⁱ

Parents of children with asthma must be particularly vigilant, especially at night. Asthma is the most common chronic childhood disease, according to the WHO. It is the primary reason for school absences, and a major cause of childhood hospitalisation.

New, pioneering study shows breast milk offers unique, early asthma prevention

In Canada, where one in seven children suffers from asthma^{iv}, the latest research offers new hope, with conclusive evidence that universal exclusive breastfeeding can reduce asthma rates in children by as much as 40%.^v It is the first study of its kind, employing scientists across 20 different disciplines, and measuring an exhaustive list of symptoms and attributes in children ages zero to five, their mothers, and their environments prospectively (rather than retrospectively, which would rely on someone’s memory of prior years). Meghan B. Azad, Assistant Professor of Paediatrics and Child Health at the University of Manitoba (Canada), leads the asthma research group as part of the Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal Development (CHILD) study.

Asst. Prof. Azad acknowledges the critical role of expressed breast milk for working mothers. At the 13th International Breastfeeding and Lactation Symposium, she will present her latest findings on the bioactive components in breast milk which prevent asthma, on the way to preserving them even better when breast milk is expressed and stored. She comments, “Our hope is that this study will guide future research on the best ways to store and feed expressed milk, and that it will inform societal policies to protect, promote and support breastfeeding.”

Improved education for families with a history of asthma

For a disease with no cure, prevention is the best medicine. Right now, mother's milk may offer the only prevention against asthma. At the 13th International Breastfeeding and Lactation Symposium, researchers and healthcare professionals will discuss whether or not it is time for a new educational program to help families with genetic histories of asthma, especially, to understand the amazing potential of mother's milk for preventing this lifelong disease.

About Medela

Founded in 1961 and headquartered in Switzerland, Medela conducts basic research in partnership with leading scientists, medical professionals and universities, to develop world-leading breastfeeding products, education, and solutions. Find out more at www.medela.com.

More Information:

- Asst. Prof. Meghan B. Azad, abstract, "[Breastfeeding, human milk composition and the developmental origins of asthma in the CHILd cohort](#)"
- 2018 speaker summaries (attachment)
- [2018 symposium programme](#)
- [Journalist registration page](#)
- [Information on press conference, 22 March 8:30–10:00](#)
- [Highlights and images from 2017 Symposium](#)

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References

ⁱ <https://www.lungenliga.ch/de/krankheiten-ihre-folgen/asthma.html>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.who.int/respiratory/asthma/en/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.who.int/respiratory/asthma/en/>

^{iv} <http://childstudy.ca/media/press-releases/asthma-clues-in-dirty-diapers/>

^v <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2017.07.012>