



Attitudes towards breastfeeding in WA, 2015

Background

The Nutrition Monitoring Survey Series has been conducted in Western Australia (WA) since 1995 to investigate knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of West Australians relating to food, nutrition and the Australian Dietary Guidelines. The surveys include assessments of dietary change as well as barriers and promoters of dietary change. The most recent survey was conducted in 2015.

The state-wide telephone survey included 1207 participants. One third (33%) of respondents were male and two thirds (67%) were female. Ages ranged from 18 to 64 years, with almost half (45%) residing in the Perth metropolitan area.

Data were weighted for sample design and probability of selection in 2015. Post survey adjustments were made to compensate for under or over representation of gender, age or areas of residence using the 2014 Estimated Resident Population for WA people aged 18 to 64 years.

Recommendations for breastfeeding

The Australian Dietary Guidelines¹ recommend that Australians should “encourage, support and promote breastfeeding”. It is recommended that infants be exclusively breastfed until around 6 months old, with continuation of breastfeeding until at least 12 months old as solids are introduced.

Key results

The importance of breastfeeding babies

- The majority (75%) of WA adults, including both males (73%) and females (77%), thought it was ‘very important’ for mothers to breastfeed their babies.

Duration of breastfeeding

- Almost a quarter (22%) of WA adults said they did not know how long a mother should breastfeed, with males (33%) more likely than females (11%) to say they did not know. Adults aged 18 to 34 years were more likely than older age groups to say they did not know.
- Only 36% of WA adults identified that babies should be exclusively breastfed for six months.
- For those who specified a time, the majority (60%) of WA adults said mothers should breastfeed for either 7 to 12 months or more than 12 months.

Perceived difficulties for breastfeeding

- The main difficulty for continuing to breastfeed for at least six months reported by WA adults was the need to return to work (42%). Other commonly cited difficulties included: poor breast milk supply (30%); problems with breast feeding (such as sore nipples) (28%); and low public acceptance and support for breastfeeding (24%).

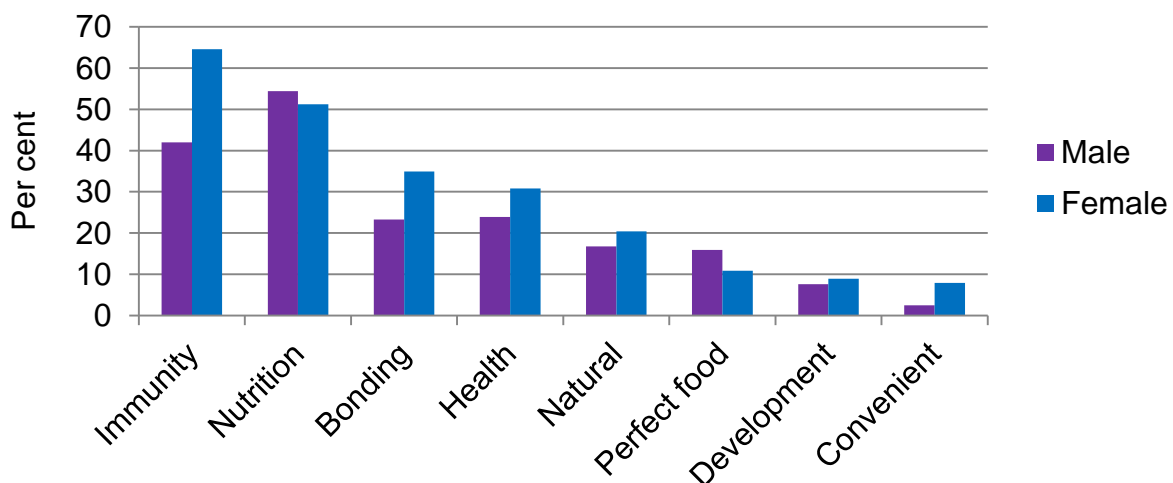
¹ Australian Government. Eat for Health. Australian Dietary Guidelines. Providing the scientific evidence for healthier Australian diets. National Health and Medical Research Council, Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2013

- More females than males perceived the need to return to work (51% compared with 34%) and poor milk supply (37% compared with 24%) as reasons women may have difficulties maintaining breastfeeding for at least six months.
- More males than females said they did not know of any reasons that would prevent a woman from breastfeeding for at least six months (14% compared with 4%).

Benefits of breastfeeding for babies

- The benefits for breastfed babies most frequently reported were 'immunity' (53%) and 'vitamins and minerals or nutrition' (53%).
- Females were more likely than males to have reported 'immunity' (65% compared with 42%) and 'convenience' (8% compared with 2%) as benefits of breastfeeding.
- Males were more likely than females to report not knowing the benefits of breastfeeding (13% compared with 3%).
- WA adults aged 18 to 34 years were more likely than those aged 55 to 64 years to specify 'nutrition' as a benefit of breastfeeding (61% compared with 43%).
- WA adults aged 18 to 34 years (2%) were less likely to specify 'convenience' as a benefit of breastfeeding than those aged 45 to 54 years (9%) and 55 to 64 years (8%).
- WA adults aged 18 to 34 years were more likely than those aged 55 to 64 years to report not knowing any benefits of breastfeeding for babies (15% compared with 2%).
- WA adults in the Perth metropolitan area were more likely than those from elsewhere in WA to reporting not knowing any benefits of breastfeeding for babies (10% compared with 3%).

Figure 1. Perceived benefits of breastfeeding for babies, by gender, NMSS 2015



Benefits of breastfeeding for mothers

- The most frequently identified benefits of breastfeeding for women were 'bonding' (71%) followed by 'getting back to pre-pregnancy weight' (24%) and 'convenience' (18%).
- Females were more likely than males to mention 'getting back to pre-pregnancy weight' (38% compared with 10%), 'convenient/easier' (24% compared with 12%) and 'cheap/cost effective' (13% compared with 4%) as benefits of breastfeeding for mothers.
- Those aged 18 to 34 years (8%) were less likely than respondents in older age groups to specify convenience as a benefit of breastfeeding for mothers.

Prepared by the Chronic Disease Prevention Directorate, Public and Aboriginal Health Division

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