

**Breastfeeding Influences, Struggles, and Benefits: Nursing Support for Teen Moms and
Infant Health**

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Adolescent pregnancy continues to be a significant public health concern in the United States. Among these young mothers, breastfeeding rates are often lower than those of adult mothers due to a combination of social, emotional, and educational challenges. Despite these obstacles, breastfeeding offers substantial benefits for both the infant and the mother, including enhanced postpartum recovery and psychological well-being. This paper will examine the influences, struggles, and benefits of breastfeeding in adolescent mothers as well as how nurses can provide evidence-based education on breastfeeding, which can offer emotional closure and connection while benefiting the infant's health.

To fully understand why breastfeeding is essential for the adolescent population, it is important to know the benefits that breastfeeding provides for mom and baby. These benefits include not only nutrition, immunity, bonding, and convenience, but also many other physical and emotional aspects for both. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2025) shares information on breastfeeding, noting that a mom's breast milk adapts over the baby's first two years to meet the baby's needs. This also includes antibodies that help babies build a strong immune system to protect themselves from illnesses. When the mom is sick, she can pass antibodies to the baby, and when the baby is sick, their saliva can help stimulate the mom's breastmilk to make the antibodies the baby needs. Convenience-wise, for both mom and baby, breast milk is free and available wherever they are, without having to worry about bringing enough formula or mixing bottles on the go. For moms specifically, breastfeeding can reduce the risk of some cancers, such as breast and ovarian cancer, type 2 diabetes, and high blood pressure (CDC, 2025). Modak et al., (2023) found that the release of hormones such as oxytocin and

prolactin in the mother during breastfeeding after birth helps promote feelings of happiness and joy, thereby promoting bonding with the baby. These hormones can also help promote body positivity in mothers after giving birth (Modak et al., 2023). Not only are these factors important for all moms, but with adolescents, they can suffer severely with social impacts after having a baby, especially when it comes to body image. This is why properly promoting breastfeeding in adolescent moms has become a significant topic globally.

While these benefits are well known to some, adolescent mothers also face many barriers that others do not. These barriers include social support, which provides feelings of being loved, accepted, and valued by friends, family, colleagues, and peers. Kullmann et al. (2021) found that a lack of social support from both family and providers played a role in these moms' hesitancy to breastfeed their babies, as well as the lack of reliable education around the topic. They found that even though the overall decision on how to feed their baby was their own, the social support from those around them greatly impacted their decision. (Kullmann et al., 2021). Many adolescent moms lack social support from their peers, family, partners, and friends, which can make the choice of feeding much harder. Especially when these mothers are in school and trying to continue their education, but also now take care of a baby, they may feel that breastfeeding or pumping is not an option for them.

In addition to struggles with social support, education plays a role in helping young mothers make choices. Many adolescent moms lack the knowledge of the different ways to feed their babies before they get pregnant. Adding on to a hospital stay and the effects of current social media that do not reliably help, encourage, and inform them can be discouraging for young moms. Yas et al. (2024) found that most adolescent mothers in the USA need adequate grandmother support from their mom to impact their choices of breastfeeding positively (Yas et

al. 2024). Not only does the mother affect their decision, but hearing their stories and having someone they know and trust to help them through the hard times with the baby can be encouraging for trying to breastfeed, whereas having adolescent moms without this support can be discouraging. Pinho-Pompeu et al. (2023) found that adolescent mothers who attended antenatal education classes felt more prepared and had an easier time participating in breastfeeding their babies for at least 6 months. This policy is in place for baby-friendly hospitals, which require all staff to provide constant breastfeeding support and education throughout all stages of labor. There is also an outpatient aspect to this, which includes educational interviews of adolescent mothers that discuss a variety of topics from contraception, newborn care, mental health, and so much more. This group meets multiple times a week and is open to both prenatal and postpartum moms (Pinho-Pompeu et al., 2023). These classes can not only help with breastfeeding but also help adolescents gain the proper knowledge to care for a newborn and manage their social life. While overall learning how to care for a newborn can be a slow process for any age mother, these young moms must get the education needed to make informed decisions about what is best for them and their baby, without the fear that their lives will have to change significantly to feed their baby. Kullmann et al. (2021) also reviews some of the common barriers for adolescent mothers to be that they were having pain or difficulty while breastfeeding, which prompted them to stop breastfeeding entirely or not exclusively breastfeed (Kullmann et al. 2021). Pain is never a good sign, but there are many techniques to breastfeeding that can help with painful nipples or difficulties. Edinger and Fairbanks (2022) found that adolescent mothers were stopping breastfeeding once they became physically uncomfortable, or they thought that they were not giving their baby enough milk. They also noticed that adolescent moms did not have the resources they needed to try and manage the difficulties of breastfeeding

when they arose. Many young moms also tend to have an unrealistic expectation that breastfeeding will just come so naturally. Unfortunately, that is not the case, and both the mom and the baby go through a learning process while breastfeeding, often causing these young moms to switch to bottle feeding. Many young moms were also found to give up breastfeeding when they left the hospital and no longer had that professional support with them (Edinger & Fairbanks, 2022). Education on different baby holds, such as the football hold vs. the cross cradle, is essential for the mom and the baby to learn which one is easier and works better for both. It is also essential to have adolescent moms show that they can successfully feed their babies without help before leaving the hospital, so that they are not solely relying on professionals for help.

Even with social support and education, mothers also deal with the challenges that come with postpartum, which can interfere with how successful breastfeeding can be. Edinger and Fairbanks (2022) noted that most adolescent moms are struggling physically and emotionally with the idea of having a newborn and going back to school or having a lack of social freedom due to breastfeeding. Most of these moms stop breastfeeding when they go back to school because of the lack of resources and independence it gives to them (Edinger & Fairbanks, 2022). Often, there are programs to help adolescent moms through the rest of their schooling. If not, it is essential to teach these moms how to pump and store their milk so they can still feed their baby at home when they are away. It is also vital that these moms know that they are not restricted to a diet or stuck with the baby all the time just because they chose to give the baby breast milk. This is another point in time when a good support system comes into play for these moms, and being willing to watch the baby while at school or social functions.

As multiple barriers become more prominent among young moms, nurses play a critical

role in the success of adolescent moms, as they are among the first people who can help influence them. It is important first to discuss the patient's support systems, knowledge of breastfeeding, and confidence level. Nurses should start by reviewing brochures or pamphlets during the first visits. If nurses initiate this process early, then these mothers can attend follow-up appointments with any questions they may have. This would allow for any clarification, concerns, or further education needs to be met, and for the feeling of outside support. Nurses also play a significant role in the immediate postpartum phase. While other support methods, such as lactation counseling at hospitals, are available, they are not always available. In these cases, it is up to the nurse to be educated and informed on how to help mom and baby on their breastfeeding journey. Nurses also play a significant role in acknowledging when a mom has had the proper education needed to take care of and feed their baby successfully. With adolescent moms, it may become a discussion of keeping them an extra day in the hospital to ensure they can feed their baby with the help they have at home, instead of professional help. Ongoing support may be needed, including scheduling home visits, providing telehealth services such as lactation support, or offering peer groups. Nurses can also advocate for adolescent mothers in the school setting to secure breastfeeding accommodations that allow them to continue breastfeeding as they return to education. Overall, by providing education, assessment, and ongoing support, nurses play a crucial role in improving breastfeeding rates amongst adolescent mothers.

Breastfeeding among adolescent mothers face unique challenges influenced by limited knowledge, social influences, and physical discomfort. The benefits for both mom and baby are significant when breastfeeding is involved; it helps foster bonding, provides emotional support, and builds confidence. Evidence-based nursing practice is essential to addressing the barriers these moms face by providing early education, support, advocacy, and accessible resources. By

building trust, guidance, and the confidence these moms need at home, nurses can help adolescent moms provide long-term health for both their babies and themselves. Supporting teen moms through their breastfeeding journey helps mothers, babies, and families build stronger connections overall.

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