

Support for Breastfeeding Mothers and Determinants of Long-term Breastfeeding in the
United States

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ABSTRACT

Despite expert recommendations to breastfeed for at least 12 months, the average age of weaning in the U.S. is three months. Drawing on a sample of 594 American mothers, this mixed methods study aimed to: 1) determine who supports breastfeeding women and what effect support has on breastfeeding duration; and 2) assess what factors influence the duration of long-term breastfeeding including weaning strategies and social support. Quantitative analyses reveal that mothers receive significant social support. Cox regression results indicate that frequently discussing breastfeeding with La Leche League and maternal grandfathers positively impacts duration, while discussing breastfeeding with physicians has a negative effect. Qualitative methods indicate that mothers who breastfeed long-term feel pressured to wean after 12 months, and that these mothers tend to follow a child-led weaning strategy. In order to promote breastfeeding for any duration, education is essential for those who support breastfeeding mothers, including health care providers.