

# RIASE

REVISTA IBERO-AMERICANA DE SAÚDE E ENVELHECIMENTO  
REVISTA IBERO-AMERICANA DE SALUD Y ENVEJECIMIENTO

## **BREASTFEEDING: FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EARLY ABANDONMENT**

Josefina Maria Letras Lopes - Centro Hospitalar de Setúbal EPE, Hospital São Bernardo, Setúbal, Portugal

Maria Antónia Fernandes Caeiro Chora - Department of Nursing, University of Évora, Évora, Portugal. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3449-3061>

## ABSTRACT

---

Breast milk is a natural, complete, dynamic nutrition with numerous nutritional, immunological and emotional benefits.

**Objective:** Identify what factors can contribute to the early abandonment of breastfeeding.

**Methods:** Systematic Literature review with research carried out on the B-on and EBSCO platforms, using the descriptors in Health Sciences in the English language: Breastfeeding, mothers and weaning, and the research carried out using the intersection between them through the Boolean operator "and ". Based on the limiters, defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, seven articles were selected.

**Outcomes:** the analyzed articles demonstrate that exist several factors that influence early weaning, and can be organized into categories: maternal factors, highlighting the hypogalactia sensation and problems such as pain, fissures or mastitis; factors related to the newborn/infant like the difficulty of adaptation to the breast and introduction of artificial milk and social factors such as return to work.

**Conclusions:** Several studies represent different social and cultural contexts, but some factors identified as hypogalactia sensation, pain, fissures, mastitis and difficulty in technique are common among them. Nursing interventions can be decisive for maintenance of breastfeeding.

**Keywords:** Breastfeeding; mothers; weaning.

## INTRODUCTION

---

Because of its many advantages, breastfeeding is recommended by the World Health Organization [WHO] exclusively up to 6 months and, in addition to food diversification, at least up to 2 years<sup>(1)</sup>. Studies show that contributes to a child better adaptation to new foods at the stage of food introduction<sup>(2)</sup>, to reducing the risk of mother and child developing certain diseases as well as increasing child's cognitive capacity<sup>(1)</sup>. Breastfeeding helps in the recovery of postpartum maternal weight<sup>(3-4)</sup> and promotes connection<sup>(5)</sup>. In the constitution of breast milk, in addition to high quality nutrients that suppress all needs of infants up to 6 months, there are elements that can contribute to increase child immunity<sup>(1)</sup>.

With a few exceptions, the ability to produce milk is inherent in all women<sup>(6)</sup>. However, maternal lactation is a complex physiological process, depends on the action of the hormones prolactin and oxytocin, lactation inhibitor factor in the breast milk and the previous development of the mammary gland, could be negatively influenced by stress or negative feelings such as pain, because they inhibit oxytocin action<sup>(7)</sup>. An adequate weight increase of the NB [Newborn]/infant, is a signal of an appropriate breast milk production<sup>(6-7)</sup>.

Breast milk is a dynamic food whose composition changes not only over time in response to the growth of the NB/infant but also throughout the breastfeeding. However, the produced milk volume, although increasing faster in the first month after delivery, remains constant until 6 months<sup>(6-7)</sup>.

Despite all the inherent advantages of breastfeeding and being a safe, practical and economically inexpensive<sup>(8)</sup> breastfeeding rates in Portugal continue to fall short of global recommendations<sup>(9)</sup>. In this sense, it is essential to identify which factors may influence the early interruption of breastfeeding, so that nurses can define effective strategies, contributing to their success.

## METHODOLOGY

---

In nurses' daily lives, evidence-based practice becomes an essential tool for the decision-making care provided process. The use of a reflective practice based on scientific results, combined with individual competence, increases care<sup>(10)</sup>.

This literature review aims to identify which factors may contribute to the early abandonment of breastfeeding. Considering the defined objective and to guide the elaboration of the research question, PICO mnemonic method was used<sup>(10)</sup>: **What factors contribute for the early abandonment of breastfeeding?**

A survey was conducted between october and november 2018 in B-on and EBSCO platforms by selecting all available databases using the descriptors in Health Sciences (DeCS 2017 edition)<sup>(11)</sup> in english language: breastfeeding, mothers and weaning, and the research using intersection between them via boolean operator "and". As delimiters of research were defined: full text articles; published on period from 2015 to 2018; in Portuguese, English and Spanish.

The inclusion criteria defined were primary articles that identified which influence early breastfeeding cessation. Exclusion criteria were: non-primary articles, which the studied sample of population was exclusively about adolescent mothers or newborns mothers and studies that did not answer the research.

From the database research, with the health descriptors and selected search delimiters, 74 articles were at EBSCO and 368 at B-on. From these articles, through weighted titles reading, and after exclusion of repeated articles, 24 eligible articles were selected. After analysis of these articles, and considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 7 were selected and included in the present study. Selected articles were analyzed for determination of its evidence level and assessment of methodological quality, according to *Joanna Briggs Institute*.

The respective evaluation grids were applied and the articles that obtained positive answers above 50% were included in this review.

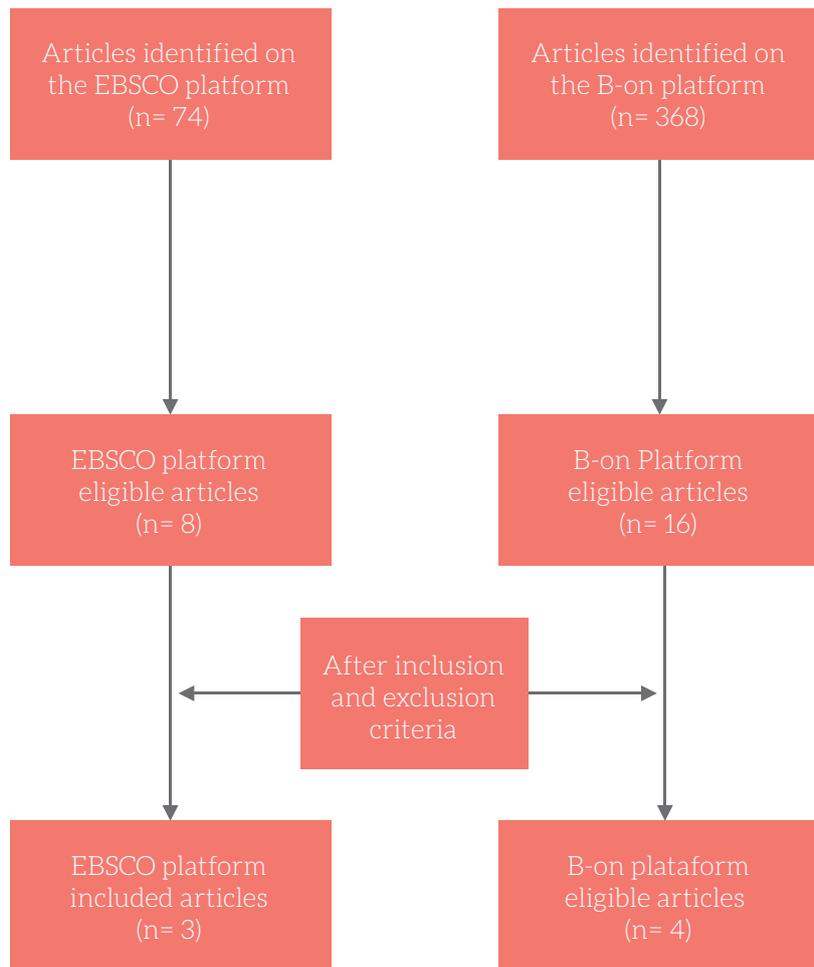


Figure 1 - Selected articles flowchart.

## RESULTS

---

After reading the selected articles, we extracted their data and the outcomes that answered research questions. Data outcomes from the analysis of the articles are presented in the following table (table 1) divided into author/year/country; study design/objective; evidence level; participants; interventions and outcomes

Table 1 - Data extracted from the analyzed articles.

Authors (year), country	Study Design, Goal	Evidence Level	Participants	Interventions	Outcomes
Oliveira CS, Locca FA, Carrijo, ML, Garcia RA (2015), Brazil.	Descriptive-exploratory research of qualitative approach. Know the maternal experiences in relation to breastfeeding and identify the constrains that influence early weaning.	4d	21 mothers with delivery date between January 2012 and January 2014.	Semi-structured interview, subject to content analysis according to Bardin.	Insecurity generated by inexperience and lack of knowledge about breastfeeding; difficulties in catching by flat or inverted nipples; problems like fissures or mastitis; lack of support from health professionals; negative influence of the maternal grandmother; return to work and considering that milk is insufficient or weak are the factors that influenced early weaning, this last one is the most prevalent.
Díaz-Gómez M, Ruzafa-Martínez M, Ares S, Espiga I, Alba C (2016), Spain.	Cross-sectional observational study. Know the motivations and difficulties to start and maintain breastfeeding.	4b	569 Spanish mothers with at least one child under the age of 2.	Structured questionnaire applied in 2013 and statistical analysis of data.	The main reason for stopping breastfeeding was the hypogalactia feeling, followed by the need to return to work and breast problems such as fissures and pain. Weaning was earlier in families with lower economic incomes. The decision to stop breastfeeding is most often maternal.

Table 1 - Data extracted from the analyzed articles.

Authors (year), country	Study Design, Goal	Evidence Level	Participants	Interventions	Outcomes
Oliveira M (2016), Portugal.	Observational, cross-sectional and analytical study. To evaluate the prevalence of breastfeeding in the first 6 months of life; identify the factors that motivate early weaning and evaluate the relationship between age and maternal education with the duration of breastfeeding.	3e	Convenience sample of 83 mothers	Applied questionnaire during the child health medical consultation at 6 months, between July 1, 2013 and June 30, 2014. Data Statistical analysis.	In the prenatal period all mothers showed an intention to breastfeed and identified its advantages. All mothers report that they received information about breastfeeding, and nurses are the main professionals who share this information. At hospital discharge 75% of children were breastfed, gradually decreasing over time, being 46.2% at 6 months. Breastfeeding rates are lower in younger and less educated women. Poor weight progression (42.9%), feeling of hypogalactia (14.3%), incompatibility with maternal work (14.3%), the infant not satisfied (10.7%) and difficulty in the breastfeeding technique. (7.1%) These are the factors mentioned for breastfeeding abandonment.

Table 1 - Data extracted from the analyzed articles.

Authors (year), country	Study Design, Goal	Evidence Level	Participants	Interventions	Outcomes
Alves TR, Carvalho JB, Cavalcante RD, Teixeira GA, Silva SF, Oliveira AM et al. (2017), Brazil.	Descriptive-exploratory research of qualitative approach. Identify the difficulties experienced by mothers that influenced the failure of exclusive breastfeeding.	4d	14 mothers.	Semi-structured interview conducted between the first and fourth month postpartum, subject to content analysis.	Breast problems (fissures, pain); negative influence of family, friends and neighbors; return to work; trivialization of maternal feelings and introduction of artificial milk were factors that influenced the failure of exclusive breastfeeding. Nurses are referred as the motivating and facilitating health professionals that help the maintenance of breastfeeding. However, they also point out that sometimes the information is not always enough and they don't raise awareness to possible problems and for this reason they contribute to feelings of frustration.
Freitas MG, Werneck AL, Borim BC. (2018), Brazil.	Observational quantitative study. Knowing the difficulties that lead to early weaning.	3e	102 mothers admitted to the immediate postpartum between June and July 2017.	Interview with formalized questions at 30, 90 and 180 days after discharge. Data Statistical analysis.	The difficulties identified were insufficient milk; fissures; introduction of artificial milk; maternity leave duration and improper catch breast.
Amaral LJ, Sales SS, Carvalho DP, Cruz GK, Azevedo IC, Júnior MA (2015), Brazil.	Descriptive-exploratory study of qualitative approach. Identify factors that may influence weaning of infants up to 6 months.	4d	14 mothers of aged infants between 1 to 6 months in exclusive or mixed breastfeeding.	Semi-structured interview conducted during home visits subject to content analysis, according to Bardin.	Insufficient milk sensation, infant Breastfeed refusal, the need to keep the NB hospitalized longer than expected; Breast problems were the main reasons for the abandonment of breastfeeding. Family members and health professionals, including nurses, helped to overcome the difficulties.

Table 1 - Data extracted from the analyzed articles.

Authors (year), country	Study Design, Goal	Evidence Level	Participants	Interventions	Outcomes
Simó MR Aguirre MIF, Diez PA, Andrés SB, Capaces TM (2015), Spain.	Descriptive cross-sectional study. Know the factors that influence the maintenance of breastfeeding and early weaning.	4b	495 mothers of infants born between September 2009 and September 2010.	Structured interview when children were between 10 and 19 months old. Data Statistical analysis.	Hypogalactia, breast fissures and return to work were the factors that led to early interruption of breastfeeding. Breastfeeding duration is longer when women receive postpartum support. Intention to breastfeed is related to longer duration of breastfeeding.

## DISCUSSION

---

After analyzing the results extracted from each study, we concluded that early breastfeeding abandonment is influenced by several factors. To facilitate the analysis, three categories emerged: maternal factors, NB/infant-related factors, and social factors.

Among maternal factors, the sensation of hypogalactia<sup>(12,13,14,16,17,18)</sup> and breastfeeding-related complications such as fissures, pain or mastitis<sup>(12,13,15,16,17,18)</sup> are identified as the main reasons for the early interruption of breastfeeding, the hypogalactia sensation is sometimes identified as the main reason<sup>(12,13,16)</sup>. The decision to abandon breastfeeding is made by the mother, without the advice of health professionals<sup>(13)</sup>.

The maternal knowledge deficit generates not only insecurity feelings<sup>(12)</sup> but also frustration feelings, as they are not informed about the difficulties/complications that could arise during<sup>(15)</sup>, which contributed to their abandonment. However, adequate knowledge about breastfeeding alone is not a premise for its success<sup>(14)</sup>. On the other hand, maternal motivation has a positive influence on the duration of breastfeeding<sup>(18)</sup>.

Regarding the factors related to the newborn/latent technique difficulty<sup>(12,14,15,16)</sup> appears as the most frequently identified factor. However, hospitalization, refusal to breastfeed<sup>(17)</sup>, the introduction of artificial milk<sup>(15-16)</sup>, poor weight progression and the feeling that the newborn/infant is not satisfied<sup>(14)</sup> are also identified factors that contributed to early discontinuation of breastfeeding.

Regarding social factors, early weaning is associated with lower income families<sup>(13)</sup>, and younger and less educated mothers<sup>(14)</sup>. The family, depending on their beliefs, may have a negative influence<sup>(12-13)</sup> or positive, proving to be an important support<sup>(17)</sup>. The maternity duration leave<sup>(16)</sup> and return to work<sup>(13,14,18)</sup> is a barrier to successful breastfeeding.

Analyzed Studies also show that nurses interventions influence the breastfeeding duration. The lack of support by these professionals<sup>(12)</sup> as well as the devaluation of maternal feelings<sup>(15)</sup> contribute to early weaning. In contrast, motivation and support appear as a determinant factor for the success of breastfeeding<sup>(15,17,18)</sup>.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

---

Although breast milk is a practical, low cost, high nutritional richness food with immunological and affective advantages that contributes to health gains, Portuguese breastfeeding rates are far from the recommended. Understanding the phenomenon is pertinent and the present review comes to answer the research question “What are the factors that contributes to the early abandonment of breastfeeding?”

From the analysis of the articles we concluded that breastfeeding abandonment is influenced by several factors: maternal factors, factors related to the newborn/infant and social factors. However, although the various studies represent different sociocultural contexts, there are common factors among them. The hypogalactia sensation and problems related to breastfeeding such as pain, fissures or mastitis are the identified factors in six of seven studies and the difficulty with the technique in four of them. From the point of view of social factors, return to work and the maternity leave duration constitute barriers to the maintenance of breastfeeding, and the changes in health policies that can promote and support it.

Nurses play a key role that leads to the success of breastfeeding because some of the factors that contribute to early weaning identified are likely to be avoided and/or resolved with appropriate nursing interventions. The articles analysis of this review also shows that nursing interventions can be decisive for the maintenance of breastfeeding.

Despite the contributions that emerged from this review, it has limitations because it does not represent the portuguese reality, requiring more national research in this area.

## BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

---

1. World Health Organization. Infant and young child feeding: model chapter for textbooks for medical students and allied health professionals [Internet]. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2009 [cited on 2018 Jul 7]. Available from: <http://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/44117>
2. Levy L, Bértolo H. Manual do Aleitamento materno [Internet]: Comité Português para a UNICEF e Comissão Nacional Iniciativa Hospitais Amigos dos Bebés; 2012 [cited on 2018 Jul 21]. Available from: <https://unicef.pt/media/1581/6-manual-do-aleitamento-materno.pdf>

3. Mannel R, Martens PJ, Walker M. Manual Prático para Consultores de Lactação. 2.<sup>a</sup> ed. Loures: Lusociência; 2011.
4. Eidelman AI, Schanler RJ. Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk. *Pediatrics* [Internet]. 2012 Mar 3 [cited on 2018 Oct 24]; 129 (3): páginas e827-e841. Available from: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2012/02/22/peds.2011-3552.full.pdf> DOI:10.1542/peds.2011-3552
5. UNICEF. Nutrition: Breastfeeding [Internet]: UNICEF; 2015 Jun 29 [cited on 2018 Apr 25]. Available from: [https://www.unicef.org/nutrition/index\\_24824.html](https://www.unicef.org/nutrition/index_24824.html)
6. Hookway L. An exploration of common infant behaviour misinterpretations that can lead to a perception of low milk supply. *Community Pract Community Practitioner* [Internet]. 2016 Jan [cited on 2018 Oct 13]; 89 (1): páginas 28-31. Available from: <https://www.communitypractitioner.co.uk/resources/2016/01/exploration-common-infant-behaviour-misinterpretations-can-lead-perception-low>
7. Truchet S, Honvo-Houéto E. Physiology of milk secretion. *Best Pract Res Clin Endocrinol Metab* [Internet]. 2017 Oct 31 [cited on 2018 Oct 13]; 31 (4): 367-384. Available from: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10911-018-9395-1> DOI: 10.1016/j.beem.2017.10.008
8. UNICEF. Nutrition: Improving breastfeeding, complementary foods and feeding practices [Internet]: UNICEF; 2017 Mar 6 [cited on 2018 Apr 25]. Available from: [https://www.unicef.org/nutrition/index\\_breastfeeding.html](https://www.unicef.org/nutrition/index_breastfeeding.html)
9. Orfão A, Santos Á, Gouveia C, Santos C (Direção Geral da Saúde). Registo de Aleitamento Materno: Relatório janeiro a dezembro 2013 [Internet]: Direção Geral da Saúde; 2014 Oct [cited on 2018 May 6]. 27 p. Available from: <https://www.dgs.pt/documentos-e-publicacoes/iv-relatorio-com-os-dados-do-registo-do-aleitamento-materno-2013.aspx>
10. Craig JV, Smyth RL. Prática Baseada na Evidência: Manual para Enfermeiros. Loures: Lusociência; 2004. 309p.
11. Descritores em Ciências da Saúde: DeCS [Internet]. ed. 2017. São Paulo (SP): BIREME/OPAS/OMS.2017 [updated May 2017; cited on 2018 Oct 3]. Available from: <http://decs.bvsalud.org/>

12. Oliveira CS, Locca FA, Carrijo, ML, Garcia RA. Amamentação e as intercorrências que contribuem para o desmame precoce. Rev Gaúcha Enferm [Internet]. 2015 Dec 3 [cited on 2018 Nov 5]; 36 (esp):16-23. Available from: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/rngenf/v36nspe/0102-6933-rngenf-36-spe-0016.pdf> DOI: 10.1590/19831447.2015.esp.56766
13. Díaz-Gómez M, Ruzafa-Martínez M, Ares S, Espiga I, Alba C. Motivaciones y barreras percibidas por las mujeres españolas en relación a la lactancia materna. Rev Esp Salud Pública [Internet]. 2016 Sep 15 [cited on 2018 Nov 5]; 90: 1-18. Available from: [http://www.mscbs.gob.es/biblioPublic/publicaciones/recursos\\_propios/resp/revista\\_cdrom/VOL90/ORIGINALES/RS90C\\_MDG.pdf](http://www.mscbs.gob.es/biblioPublic/publicaciones/recursos_propios/resp/revista_cdrom/VOL90/ORIGINALES/RS90C_MDG.pdf)
14. Oliveira M. Aleitamento Materno: Estudo de Prevalência e Fatores Condicionantes nos Primeiros Seis Meses de Vida. Pensar Enfermagem [Internet]. 2016 1<sup>st</sup> semester [cited on 2018 Nov 5]; 20 (1):4-15. Available from: [http://pensarenfermagem.esel.pt/files/Artigo1\\_4\\_15.pdf](http://pensarenfermagem.esel.pt/files/Artigo1_4_15.pdf)
15. Alves TR, Carvalho JB, Cavalcante RD, Teixeira GA, Silva SF, Oliveira AM et al. Influences of Non-Accession to Exclusive Breastfeeding: Understanding of Feminine Subjectivity. International archives of Medicine [Internet]. 2017 Jan 24 [cited on 2018 Nov 5]; 10 (172):1-9. Available from: <http://www.intarchmed.com/> DOI: 10.3823/2442
16. Freitas MG, Werneck AL, Borim BC. Exclusive breastfeeding: adhesion and difficulties. J Nurs UFPE online [Internet]. 2018 Sep 1 [cited on 2018 Nov 5]; 12 (9):2301-2307. Available from: <https://periodicos.ufpe.br/revistas/revistaenfermagem/article/viewFile/234910/29900> DOI: 10.5205/1981-8963-v12i9a234910p2301-2307-2018
17. Amaral LJ , Sales SS, Carvalho DP, Cruz GK, Azevedo IC, Júnior MA. Factors that influence the interruption of exclusive breastfeeding in nursing mothers. Rev Gaúcha Enferm [Internet]. 2015 Oct 20 [cited on 2018 Nov 5]; 36 (esp):127-134. Available from: [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1983-14472015000500127&lng=en&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1983-14472015000500127&lng=en&nrm=iso) DOI: 10.1590/19831447.2015.esp.56676
18. Simó MR Aguirre MF, Díez PA, Andrés SB, Capaces TM. Lactancia materna: Factores relacionados con la initiation, la exclusividad y la duration. Metas Enferm [Internet]. 2015 Mar [cited on 2018 Nov 5]; 18 (2):69-75. Available from: <https://www.enfermeria21.com/revistas/metas/articulo/80713/>

Correspondence: josefina.letas.lopes@hotmail.com