

## Why more Black women don't breastfeed

Written by Kimberly Seals Allers  
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'Breastfeeding is for poor people,' my mom once said to me," explains Nicole, a 37-year-old mom from New Jersey, who breastfed two children for a year. "My mom is a very progressive woman, but this was the thinking of her generation. I couldn't believe it."

As children of that generation, many modern mothers don't have that breastfeeding legacy or support from their mothers, mothers-in-law, or extended family members. And due to the oversexualization of the breasts, some women have forgotten or are even uncomfortable with using the breast for its actual intended purpose. Go figure! Others worry that their man will complain (please tell him baby comes first). Myths such as "breastfeeding hurts" (truth: only if the baby is not latched properly) or "breastfeeding is too time-consuming" (truth: whipping out a breast is a lot quicker than sterilizing bottles, mixing, measuring, or heating up formula) still linger among Black mothers.

Throw in the economic pressures that put many Black women back at work soon after delivery, and there's a "why bother" mentality that makes breastfeeding seem more like a challenge and a chore. The results speak for themselves. According to national data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, about 45% of African-American women breastfed their babies during the early postpartum period, compared to 66% of Hispanic mothers and 68% of white mothers who breastfed during that same period. Of African-American women who do choose to breastfeed, the duration is short, with many discontinuing in the first days after birth, their data shows.

"Before I nursed my son and daughter, none of the women in my family had ever breastfed before," says Kathi Barber, founder of the African-American Breastfeeding Alliance and author of *The Black Woman's Guide to Breastfeeding*. "But I decided change would start with me when I learned breastfeeding has health benefits for mothers and babies alike."

And while modern white mothers have reclaimed breastfeeding as hip and trendy, with help from outspoken and high-profile celebrity moms like Angelina Jolie, Black celebrity mothers are still mostly mum on the topic. As a new generation of confident, empowered Black mothers, we owe it to ourselves and our babies to give them breast milk -- the very best. According to the CDC, Black babies are twice as likely as white infants to die before their first birthday. A 2001 study in *Pediatrics* concluded that an increase in African-American breastfeeding rates alone could reduce this disparity. To do so, every Black mother needs to become our own celebrity spokesperson (hey, we're beautiful with full lips!) to speak out and speak up to encourage and support breastfeeding in our own sister circles. It begins with you.

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LINK: [http://www.momlogic.com/2009/05/breastfeeding\\_part\\_1.php](http://www.momlogic.com/2009/05/breastfeeding_part_1.php)