

LACTATION AND THE RISK OF CANCER

WCRF/AICR GRADING		DECREASES RISK		INCREASES RISK	
		Exposure	Cancer site	Exposure	Cancer site
STRONG EVIDENCE	Convincing				
	Probable	Lactation ¹	Breast 2017 ²		
LIMITED EVIDENCE	Limited – suggestive	Lactation ¹	Ovary 2014		
STRONG EVIDENCE	Substantial effect on risk unlikely	None identified			

- 1 In this Third Expert Report, the term ‘lactation’ refers to the process by which the mother produces milk to breastfeed. Evidence about cancer risk presented here relates to effects on the mother who is breastfeeding and not to effects on the child who is being breastfed.
- 2 The Panel’s conclusion for lactation and breast cancer relates to evidence for breast cancer overall, either pre or postmenopause (which was not always specified in studies). The CUP uses the term ‘breast cancer (unspecified)’ in this case. The separate evidence for lactation and pre or postmenopausal breast cancer was less conclusive but consistent with the overall finding.

Summary of CUP dose–response meta-analyses of lactation¹ and the risk of cancer

Cancer	Total no. of studies	No. of studies in meta-analysis	No. of cases	Risk estimate (95% confidence interval [CI])	Increment/contrast	I ² (%)	Conclusion ²	Date of CUP cancer report ³
Breast ⁴	18	13	11,610	0.98 (0.97–0.99)	5 months of breastfeeding	0	Probable: Decreases risk	2017
Ovary ⁵	3	3	817	0.90 (0.75–1.08)	Ever vs never	–	Limited – suggestive: Decreases risk	2014

- 1

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- 2

See Definitions of WCRF/AICR grading criteria (**Section 1:** Lactation and the risk of cancer: a summary matrix) for explanations of what the Panel means by ‘probable’ and ‘limited – suggestive’.
- 3

Throughout this Third Expert Report, the year given for each cancer site is the year the CUP cancer report was published, apart from for nasopharynx, cervix and skin, where the year given is the year the SLR was last reviewed. Updated CUP cancer reports for nasopharynx and skin will be published in the future.
- 4

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- 5

A dose–response meta-analysis of cohort studies could not be conducted in the CUP. Evidence is from a CUP highest versus lowest meta-analysis as studies did not report information on the duration of breastfeeding.