A systematic review of maternal obesity and breastfeeding intention, initiation and duration

The beneficial effects of breastfeeding have long been documented. Recent studies have highlighted a dose-dependent association between longer duration of breastfeeding and decrease in the risk of overweight in later life. In fact, these have estimated that 13,639 cases of obesity could be prevented in England and Wales over 9 years if infants were breastfed for at least three months. The aim of this systematic review was to examine the relationship between maternal overweight and obesity and breastfeeding intention and initiation and duration.

Overall, the study has highlighted four possible reasons why overweight/obese women are less likely to breastfeed: (i) anatomical/physiological, (ii) medical conditions, (iii) socio-cultural and (iv) psychological. Women’s decision to breastfeed is therefore impacted by multiple factors that enable – or prevent them – them to successfully breastfeed.