

Breastfeeding during treatment with lithium

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Conclusion

Breastfeeding was found safe during treatment with lithium in full-term, healthy infants under strict follow-up. Larger studies are needed to decide whether exclusive breastfeeding could be recommended in some cases.

Introduction

It has long been debated, whether breastfeeding can be allowed during maternal treatment with lithium. Many mothers treated with lithium have a strong wish to breastfeed.

Method

A cohort of 30 breastfed infants to mothers treated with lithium were followed in Stockholm, Sweden, between 2006-2021. The data were collected retrospectively from the patients' medical records. Half of the infants were exclusively breastfed.

Recommendation

Breastfeeding during treatment with lithium may be allowed if:

- The infant is healthy and full-term
- The psychiatrist considers it safe for the mother
- The infant serum lithium concentrations and clinical symptoms are followed repeatedly during the first months of life.
- Daily bottle feeds are introduced at 1-2 weeks of age to enable reduction in lithium exposure when necessary.

Results

Lithium concentrations

Lithium concentrations in infant serum and infant-mother ratios were highest in the second week of life, with a median(range) of 0.1 (<0.05–0.7) mmol/L and 0.29 (0.08-1.17) and stabilized at low levels after the first month in life (Fig.1, Fig.2).

Figure 1. Infant serum lithium concentrations over time in fully and partly breastfed infants.

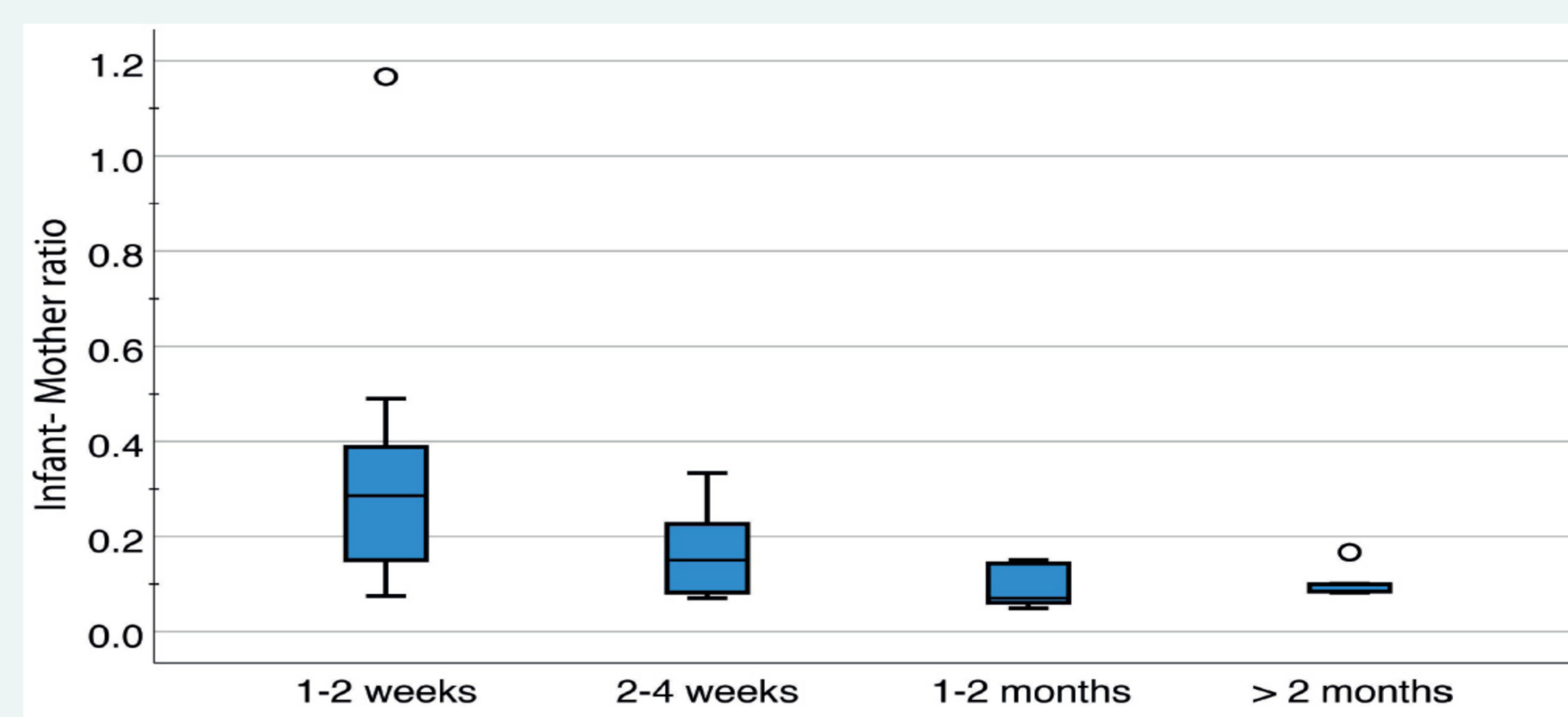
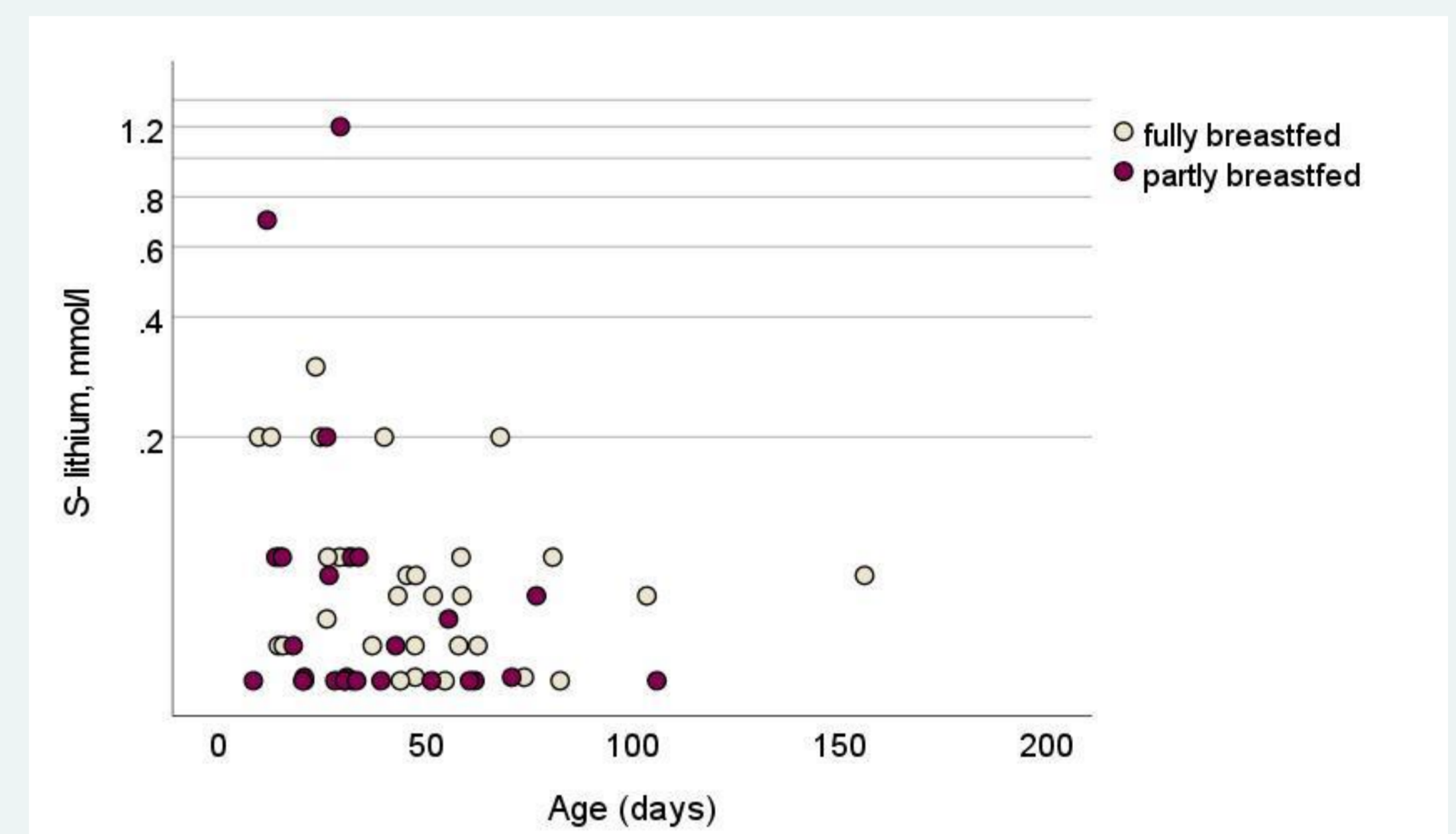


Figure 2. Infant-mother lithium ratios at 1-2 weeks, 2-4 weeks, 1-2 months and >2 months after birth.

Adverse effects

Four infants had insufficient growth and two of them were found tired before one month of age. All were well after supplemental formula feed was increased. One infant with a high lithium concentration at follow-up was preterm and the other had an Apparent Life-Threatening Event at two days of age.

More in this subject

Listen to the presentations by K. Tötterman on neonatal effects after lithium exposure and I. Alvarez on breastfeeding during treatment with lamotrigine to learn more about our research.



Link to the article

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