

Pregnancy may increase the risk of developing binge eating disorder

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Pregnancy may open a window of vulnerability for developing binge eating disorder, especially for women from lower socio-economic situations, according to a study from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill researchers and colleagues in Norway.

In a long-term study of 100,000 pregnant Norwegian women, the researchers saw an unexpected increase in new incidences of binge eating disorder that began during pregnancy. The research is the largest population-based study of eating disorders during pregnancy.

Previously, small clinical studies had suggested that often eating disorders go into remission during pregnancy, just as some pregnant women spontaneously quit smoking cigarettes.

“We need to be very vigilant across the socioeconomic spectrum to screen for the development of disordered eating during pregnancy. It’s very important that all women receive adequate prenatal care that includes nutritional support,” said Dr. Cynthia M. Bulik, lead study author and William R. and Jeanne H. Jordan Distinguished Professor of eating disorders in the department of psychiatry at the UNC School of Medicine and the department of nutrition in the UNC School of Public Health.

The findings were published in the August 2007 issue of *Psychological Medicine*. The research was supported by grants from the National Institutes of Health.

Binge eating differs from the normal cravings that pregnant women often report, Bulik explained. People with binge eating disorder regularly consume large amounts of food in a set period of time and report feeling out-of-control during the episode.

The disorder differs from bulimia nervosa in that sufferers don't engage in purging, such as using vomiting or laxatives.

In addition to contributing to weight gain and obesity, binge eating disorder is also associated with health problems such as anxiety and depression, insomnia, and chronic pain.

In the study, for women who already had the disorder, continuation of symptoms during pregnancy was more common than remission, the researchers found. New cases were more likely than other eating disorders to develop during pregnancy. Lower education and lower minimum combined income was associated with new onset cases of binge eating disorders.

The researchers will follow the impact of eating disorders, especially binge eating, on the women and their children over time. They want to find out, for instance, if fluctuating nutrients during gestation have impact on children's birth weight, development and childhood and adolescent eating and weight patterns.

“We have this group of women that we need to study intensively to find out the impact of binge eating on offspring. We didn't know these women existed before,” Bulik said.

Source: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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