

Food insecurity increases risk of weight gain and complications during pregnancy

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A recent research study has shown that food insecurity, a person's inability to obtain adequate amounts of food due to resource constraints, can lead to greater weight gain and increased complications during a woman's pregnancy.

"Prior studies have shown that women living in food insecure households are more likely to experience health complications," said Craig Gundersen, a University of Illinois associate professor of agricultural and consumer economics and co-author of the study. "An area that hadn't been closely examined is the impact of [food insecurity](#) on pregnant women."

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 14.6 percent of households were food insecure at some time during 2008, up from 11.1 percent in 2007. This is the highest recorded prevalence rate of food insecurity since 1995, when the first national food security survey was conducted.

"In the United States, we are very concerned about issues related to food insecurity," Gundersen said. "We are of course concerned about people going hungry and not having enough to eat. We are also concerned about the negative health consequences associated with food insecurity."

For the study, a total of 810 low- and middle-income pregnant women were surveyed during January 2001 to June 2005. Women were surveyed at the beginning of their pregnancy and a follow-up survey was

administered after the birth of their child.

"We looked at the effect of food insecurity on a variety of health factors related to pregnancy," Gundersen said. "We found that food insecurity is associated with a higher [body mass index](#), greater [weight gain](#) during pregnancy, and a higher risk for the development of [gestational diabetes](#). These health issues are a concern as they can lead to assorted negative medical conditions."

Gundersen said an important federal program is already in place to address food insecurity in the United States. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, provides assistance to low-income individuals. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that the number of Americans receiving food stamps reached 39.68 million in February 2010, the highest number since the program began in 1962.

"Food insecurity is a growing concern for many U.S. citizens," Gundersen said. "The expansion of the SNAP program could offer major health benefits for people struggling to afford nutritious foods during these difficult economic times."

Provided by University of Illinois College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

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