

Increased risk of cardiovascular disease for pregnant women with high blood pressure

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Women with high blood pressure during pregnancy have an increased risk of high blood pressure even 40 years after maternity, which leads in turn to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease. This has been demonstrated by researchers at Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

In a recent study, researchers at Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg examined 105 women who gave birth in the early 1970s. Half the women had elevated blood pressure during pregnancy, while the other half had a normal pregnancy.

The study shows that women who had elevated blood pressure during pregnancy were more frequently diagnosed with high blood pressure even 35 to 40 years later. The same women showed signs of increased stiffening of the [arteries](#) and some deterioration in the blood sugar balance.

"We can see that even a minor increase in blood pressure can be connected to some [deterioration](#) in the heart's structure and function in these women. Together, these findings can partly explain the increased risk of cardiovascular disease," says Anna-Clara Collén, who reports the results in her thesis.

In order to maintain a healthy cardiovascular system after the menopause, women who have had [high blood pressure](#) during pregnancy should make an effort to regain [normal blood pressure](#) after pregnancy.

"This is about being physically active and avoiding [overweight](#), for example. It is also important to have accurate and regular blood pressure check-ups," says Anna-Clara Collén.

The Gothenburg study also shows that the women who reported greater self-perceived stress in recent years had a larger waist circumference than those who reported less stress. A larger waist circumference is associated with an increased [risk of cardiovascular disease](#).

Facts about the study

In order to understand the mechanism behind why women with raised blood pressure in pregnancy have an increased risk of future cardiovascular disease, the researchers examined the women's blood pressure and pulse, structure and function of the heart and blood vessels, weight and [waist circumference](#) and sugar, hormone and salt balance. The women's self-perceived stress was also logged, as well as, in a smaller section of the study population, activity in the sympathetic nervous system.

The thesis Hypertension and cardiovascular risk factors in women – a follow-up study forty years after hypertensive pregnancies will be the subject of a doctoral disputation on 25 April at 9.00 in Östra aulan, Centralkliniken, SU/Östra, Gothenburg.

More information: Link to thesis: gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/32005

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