

Heart-healthy lifestyle and nutrition during pregnancy helps kids develop healthy hearts

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What a woman eats and how she cares for her heart health while pregnant may influence the child's overall cardiovascular health and body weight years later, according to two preliminary studies to be presented at the American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions 2019—November 16-18 in Philadelphia.

The studies identified health and nutrition factors during pregnancy that may be linked to a child's health as they mature, highlighting the longer-term impact of lifestyle and nutrition decisions during pregnancy.

"Pregnancy is a perfect time for women to focus on living a [heart-healthy lifestyle](#)," said Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., M.P.H., FAAFP, American Heart Association Chief Medical Officer for Prevention. "We're learning more every day about how a mother's lifestyle and [food choices](#) while pregnant influence a child's health in utero and after birth."

Mother's heart health during pregnancy linked to healthier children (Poster Presentation MDP454)

Children who are between 10 to 14 years of age are more likely to have good cardiovascular health if their mothers had good [heart health](#) during pregnancy, according to new research from Northwestern University in Chicago.

Using data from the Hyperglycemia and Adverse Pregnancy Outcome Follow Up Study, including 877 mother-child pairs from nine [health centers](#) in six countries, researchers scored pregnant women as having high, moderate or low cardiovascular health, using 5 of the 7 metrics from the American Heart Association's Life's Simple 7 score—weight, avoidance of tobacco products, blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure. Ten to 14 years later, the children's heart health was scored using the same metrics for cardiovascular health except for tobacco use.

Mothers who had the highest cardiovascular health scores during pregnancy had children with the healthiest hearts as tweens and teens. Mothers with the lowest heart health scores during pregnancy had children with significantly lower cardiovascular scores at 10 to 14 years old.

"We were surprised at how strong this relationship was," said Amanda M. Perak, M.D., M.S., lead author of the study and assistant professor of pediatrics and preventive medicine at Northwestern University and pediatric cardiologist at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. Dr. Perak is also a member of the American Heart Association's Epidemiology Statistics Committee.

"Our findings suggest that the mother's cardiovascular health during pregnancy affects the in-utero environment in a way that may program the child's [cardiovascular health](#) long-term," Perak said.

This was an observational study and not designed to prove cause and effect.

Eating fast food during pregnancy raises risk of weight gain in young children (Poster Presentation Mo3072)

Eating mostly [fast food](#) during the second trimester of pregnancy may be linked to children becoming obese as early as age four, according to new research from the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis.

Children of mothers who reported eating the most fast foods, such as fried chicken and fish, mayonnaise, sugary drinks, fruit juices and other items, defined as a fast-food eating pattern, had children who were more likely to gain weight rapidly during their first year and become overweight by age 4.

"These findings are very important," said lead study author, Zunsong Hu, Ph.D., a postdoctoral research associate at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center. "Animal studies have shown that prenatal 'junk food' intake leads to a greater preference for fatty, sugary and salty foods and increased risk for obesity in offspring. Our study provides evidence for this association for the first time in a U.S. population including both whites and blacks. Future studies are still needed to validate these findings."

Hu added that promoting healthy eating during pregnancy may provide an early and effective method for curbing the significant increasing [health](#) burden caused by childhood obesity.

"Our findings suggest that [pregnant women](#) should eat fried food and sugar-sweetened beverages sparingly to decrease the risk of obesity in their [children](#)," said Hu.

The study participants included 1,257 women in the CANDLE study (Conditions Affecting Neurocognitive Development and Learning in Early Childhood) who completed food frequency questionnaires to evaluate the foods and beverages consumed during [pregnancy](#). The study identified a trend among the participants but does not prove cause and

effect.

Provided by American Heart Association

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