

High blood pressure while pregnant linked to poorer memory years later

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(HealthDay)—High blood pressure and pre-eclampsia during pregnancy

may follow women through the years, causing lower scores on tests of memory and thinking skills, a Dutch study suggests.

The study of nearly 600 [pregnant women](#) included 481 with [normal blood pressure](#) and 115 who developed [high blood pressure](#) during their pregnancies.

Of those 115 women, 70% had gestational hypertension, which is high blood pressure that starts after 20 weeks of pregnancy in women who previously had normal readings. The other 30% had pre-eclampsia, a pregnancy complication marked by high blood pressure and elevated protein levels in the urine that develop after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

"Women with high blood pressure that starts in pregnancy, as well as women with pre-eclampsia, should be monitored closely after their pregnancy, and they and their physicians should consider [lifestyle changes](#) and other treatments that may help reduce their risk of decline in their thinking and memory skills later in life," said study author Dr. Maria Adank. She is with the department of obstetrics and gynecology at Erasmus University Medical Center in Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

Adank's team tested the study participants after 15 years, asking them to recall a list of 15 words, first right away and then again after 20 minutes.

On the immediate recall test, which was given three times, women who had no high blood pressure problems 15 years earlier scored an average 28 points out of a possible 45. The women who had high blood pressure during pregnancy posted an average score of 25.

After adjusting for other factors that could affect thinking skills, such as a woman's weight before pregnancy, her education and ethnicity, the researchers found that women who had high blood pressure during pregnancy performed worse on the immediate and delayed recall task.

The investigators found no differences between the two groups on tests of fine motor skills, verbal fluency, processing speed and visual-spatial ability.

The women were not given memory or thinking tests before or during their pregnancies, the authors noted in the report published online Dec. 30 in the journal *Neurology*.

Adank said the study does not show a cause-and-effect relationship between high blood pressure and test scores, only an association.

"It's important to consider gestational hypertension and pre-eclampsia as [risk factors](#) for [cognitive impairment](#) that are specific to women," Adank said in a news release from the American Academy of Neurology.

"Many women may think of this as a temporary issue during pregnancy and not realize that it could potentially have long-lasting effects."

More study is needed to learn whether early treatment can prevent thinking and memory problems in [women](#) with a history of high blood pressure in [pregnancy](#), she added.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [high blood pressure during pregnancy](#).

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