

# Women born to obese mothers much more likely to be obese as adults

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Credit: University of Auckland

Overweight mothers were nearly three times more likely than normal-weight mothers to have a daughter who would become obese as an adult, a large study has found.

And [obese mothers](#) were nearly five times more likely to have a daughter who would grow up to become obese.

Researchers examined early pregnancy data on 26,561 Swedish mother-and-daughter pairs. Another finding emerged that starkly highlights the rising worldwide [obesity](#) epidemic: obesity rates jumped four-fold between the two generations of women, from 3.1 per cent among the [mothers](#) entering pregnancy in 1982-1988, to 12.3 per cent among their daughters in 2000-2008.

"These findings add to the international evidence for a worsening intergenerational cycle of obesity," says one of the researchers, Dr José Derraik from the Liggins Institute.

The study is part of a series by collaborators from the Liggins Institute, based at the University of

Auckland, and Uppsala University in Sweden. The team has analysed a rich body of data on Swedish women to better understand the long-term effects of early life events and conditions occurring before, during, and after pregnancy.

Obesity is a serious health issue for both mothers and their children. Almost one in three New Zealand adults are obese.

"Being obese increases a pregnant woman's risk of developing pre-eclampsia, gestational diabetes, miscarriage and infant mortality," explains Dr Derraik.

"Also, there is mounting evidence that obesity during pregnancy may affect children's health not only in childhood, but also in adult life."

Other researchers have proposed an "intergenerational obesity cycle", where obese mothers provide too much nutrition to their babies during gestation, and the babies become adapted to store more fat in childhood and adulthood.

This striking rise in [obesity rates](#) could also be partly explained by the so-called "obesogenic environment", where the family diet and lifestyle could be fostering the development of obesity among daughters.

"This study underlines how vital it is to try to break the obesity cycle by doing what we can to prevent obesity early in life," says Dr Derraik.

"Unfortunately, this is not easy. Obesity is a serious public health issue that requires solutions at every level of society."

The study was published in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

**More information:** José G. B. Derraik et al. Obesity rates in two generations of Swedish women entering pregnancy, and associated obesity

risk among adult daughters, *Scientific Reports*  
(2015). DOI: [10.1038/srep16692](https://doi.org/10.1038/srep16692)

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