

[IMAGE]

Cholesterol: Link between Mother and Child?

Cholesterol is critical to many bodily functions (cell membrane production, sex hormones, digestive processes), although most people don't think of it in such a positive light. That's because excess cholesterol in the bloodstream can also cause hardening of the arteries, otherwise known as atherosclerosis, which is associated with an increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

Children generally have low cholesterol concentrations and don't develop atherosclerosis. However, atherosclerotic "lesions" (evidence of thickening in the arteries caused by the buildup of excess cholesterol) have been noted in some young adults and infants, even without a family history of the disease. This suggests that other factors may be involved.

A study published in the October 9, 1999 issue of *The Lancet* examined whether hypercholesterolemia (high cholesterol levels in the blood) in mothers could be linked to the same condition in their children. More than 150 children age 1-3 were classified by whether their mother had normal or high levels of cholesterol during pregnancy; the children were then examined for evidence of atherosclerotic lesions.

Results showed that lesions were more pronounced and developed more rapidly in children whose mothers had high cholesterol levels, and this observation could not be explained when accounting for the conventional risk factors (high-cholesterol diet, family history, etc.).

These findings add to the considerable evidence emphasizing the importance of a healthy lifestyle during pregnancy. What you do while you're pregnant doesn't just affect you < it can affect the health and safety of your child. Consult with your team of health care professionals to optimize your prenatal care.

Reference:

Napoli C, Glass CK, Witztum JL, et al. Influence of maternal hypercholesterolemia during pregnancy on progression of early atherosclerotic lesions in childhood: fate of early lesions in children (FELIC) study. *The Lancet*, October 9, 1999: Vol. 354, No. 9186, pp1234-41.

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