[IMAGE]

When Baby Comes, "Good" Cholesterol May Go

Ah, the joy of pregnancy - in spite of the hormonal changes, unavoidable weight gain, increasing inability to sit down or sit up on your own, and a host of other frustrations, most women say it’s one of the most magical times of their lives. The culmination of this nine-month adventure is a bubbly bundle of wonderment and perfection. Life couldn’t be better, right? Well, according to a recent study, there might be at least one unforseen drawback to a first pregnancy: a reduction in your HDL cholesterol.

"HDL" or high-density lipoprotein cholesterol is also known as "good" cholesterol, because evidence suggests that it actually helps protect against heart disease, and may remove excess low-density lipoprotein (LDL, or "bad") cholesterol from plaque on arterial walls. The more HDL cholesterol we have, the better. Researchers tracked nearly 2,000 U.S. women from 1986-96, establishing lipid profiles at baseline and tracking changes over three time intervals (baseline to years 3, 5 and 7). Results showed that "pregnancy exerts persistent adverse effects on HDL cholesterol," according to the study authors. LDL cholesterol did not change over any interval based on pregnancy/childbirth status.

If you’re expecting, be sure to meet regularly with your health care team to ensure a healthy pregnancy - for you and for your soon-to-arrive child. Ask about ways you can stay healthy, both during pregnancy and following delivery. And whether you’re pregnant or not, ask your doctor about improving your cholesterol profile with appropriate nutritional modifications. A number of foods may help increase HDL cholesterol levels, including fish (particularly salmon), olive or canola oil, spinach, avocado, and soy products. Evidence also suggests it may be just as important to avoid sources of LDL or "bad" cholesterol, such as eggs, butter and other high-fat items.

To access a wealth of information on women’s health, including pregnancy, visit www.chiroweb.com/find/archives/women.

Reference:

Gunderson EP, Lewis CE, Murtaugh MA, et al. Long-term plasma lipid changes associated with a first birth. The Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults Study. *American Journal of Epidemiology* 2004;159(11):1028-39.