

[IMAGE]

Are You Stressing Your Baby?

By Editorial Staff

A mother's stress before and during pregnancy isn't just a health risk for herself; it could also negatively impact her child – and not just during the birthing process. Research suggests the damage may stay with the child for a lifetime.

A pair of studies conducted by the same researchers paint a bleak picture for mothers and their children when maternal stress is too high, with one study suggesting it can lead to preterm birth, and the other suggesting it can accelerate the child's aging process. Women with the highest levels of stress – defined as feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope – were more likely to give birth at least one week sooner than women who reported low levels of stress.

to do list - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Women with high pre-pregnancy and pregnancy stress also delivered children whose DNA telomeres – the protective caps on the ends of DNA strands – were shorter at ages 3-5 than similarly aged children whose mothers reported low levels of pre-pregnancy and pregnancy stress. Telomere length has been shown to be a key predictor of cellular aging.

The study linking maternal stress to preterm birth appears in *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*; the study on stress and telomere length appears in *Psychoneuroendocrinology*. Together, the studies provide convincing evidence that expectant mothers should find ways to manage their stress – for their baby's sake, but also for their own sake – during what should be a wonderful, *low-stress* time.

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