

[IMAGE]

## High BP While Pregnant? Bad for You, Bad for Baby

By Editorial Staff

High blood pressure is never a good thing, but when you're expecting a child, it can have severe consequences – and not just for you. New research suggests women who experience high blood pressure during pregnancy are more likely to birth a child who suffers from a neurodevelopmental disorder such as autism or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Among more than 1 million mothers, a hypertension-complicated pregnancy increased the odds of delivering a child who ultimately suffered from an autism spectrum disorder or ADHD, even when accounting for variables that might otherwise elevate the risk for such disorders (such as family history of the condition due to environmental or genetic factors, etc.). The study, published in *JAMA Network Open*, relied on data regarding maternal high blood pressure from mothers who delivered their child between 1987 and 1996, and autism / ADHD status among offspring tracked until the end of 2014.

Why is high blood pressure bad during pregnancy? As you can tell, it can negatively impact the child – and not just in terms of neurodevelopmental disorders. High BP can reduce blood flow to the placenta, restricting oxygen and nutrient delivery to the fetus, which can elevate the risk of low birth weight, premature birth and other health issues.

For the mother, high BP is dangerous for several reasons during pregnancy, including increased risk of premature delivery (which can have health risks compared to delivery on or around the expected due date). And of course, high blood pressure is risky whether pregnant or not, as it elevates the risk of cardiovascular disease and cardiac events (heart attack, stroke). While high blood pressure sometimes occurs during pregnancy (e.g., gestational high BP or pre-eclampsia, both of which develop after 20 weeks of pregnancy), many women have chronic high blood pressure (even when not pregnant) due to weight, poor diet, inadequate physical activity, excess alcohol consumption, stress and other factors. Those are the controllable factors we all can and should modify to keep our blood pressure in the safe range.

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