How Caffeine During Pregnancy Can Damage Your Baby

Posted by: Dr. Mercola
January 03 2009 | 21,882 views

A new study shows that one dose of caffeine -- just two cups of coffee -- ingested during pregnancy may be enough to affect fetal heart development and reduce heart function over the entire lifespan of the child.

In addition, the researchers also found that this minimal amount of exposure can lead to higher body fat among males. Although the study was in mice, the biological cause and effect described in the research paper likely applies to humans as well.

Researchers studied pregnant mice for 48 hours. Mice given caffeine produced embryos with a thinner layer of tissue separating some of the heart's chambers.

The researchers then examined the mice born from these groups to determine the long-term effects on the offspring. All of the adult males exposed to caffeine as fetuses had an increase in body fat of about 20 percent, and decrease in cardiac function of 35 percent.

Sources:
» Eurekalert December 16, 2008

Dr. Mercola's Comments:

I’ve been warning of the dangers of caffeine to pregnant women for years.

Amidst the ever changing, often conflicting information about what constitutes a “safe” amount of caffeine for expectant mothers, it has always been my position that no amount of caffeine during pregnancy is safe.
As this study points out – and this is a significant finding for mainstream research – the equivalent of just two cups of coffee during pregnancy may affect your child’s heart function, and if your baby is male, could also lead to a weight problem.

Take note. That’s the equivalent of two cups of coffee during the entire pregnancy – not two cups of coffee per day.

**How Caffeine Affects Your Unborn Baby**

Caffeine is an addictive, stimulant drug that passes easily through the placenta to the developing fetus. It is also transferred through breast milk.

In babies (newborns and unborn), the half-life of caffeine is extended. It stays in your baby longer, and a developing fetus has no ability to detoxify caffeine.

Research has shown that ingesting caffeine during pregnancy can result in a wide range of problems for you and your baby, including:

- Increased risk of miscarriage
- **Low birth weight**
- Birth defects such as cleft palate
- Increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (**SIDS**)
- Decreased levels of iron and calcium in the expectant mother

**Coffee and Pesticides**

Another good reason to eliminate caffeine while pregnant is the fact that coffee crops grown outside the U.S. are heavily sprayed with pesticides.

Pesticides have been linked to a host of health problems, including miscarriages and **stillbirths**.

**Caffeine Sources**

Caffeine can be found in a variety of drinks, food, and medications. Common sources of caffeine:

Coffee (even decaf coffee contains a few milligrams of caffeine)

- Tea
- Cola drinks
- **Energy drinks**
- Cocoa and chocolate
- Over the counter and prescription drugs (especially pain medications)
Another Food to Avoid During Pregnancy -- Soy

Soy products are a serious hazard and you should avoid them while pregnant and breastfeeding.

Soybeans contain compounds called phytoestrogens that act on hormones. These hormones affect the way your baby’s brain is organized, development of reproductive organs, and even your child’s immune system.

Infants who receive excess amounts of phytoestrogens in the womb or after birth from soy formula, risk health problems as wide ranging as early puberty, learning and behavioral problems, and severe allergies.

If you’d like to learn more about the dangers of soy, including how it affects fertility and fetal development, I recommend you read The Whole Soy Story by Kaayla Daniel.

More Tips for a Healthy Pregnancy

As with any success in life, a healthy pregnancy requires planning and preparation.

If you are in good physical condition before you start or grow your family, you’ll greatly improve your chances of a healthy pregnancy and delivery. You’ll also give your child the best opportunity for a strong start in life.

Additional tips for a healthy pregnancy include:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Make sure your diet includes omega-3 fats
- Give up your cell phone
- Keep stress in check
- Optimize your vitamin D levels
- Get regular exercise