

Study Proves Why Pregnancy is Not a Time to Stay Home and Get Fat

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I was 16 weeks pregnant with my second baby when some unexplained bleeding led me to the emergency room. The ultrasound detected placenta previa - in which the placenta was covering my cervix. My midwives would watch it throughout the pregnancy to see if the placenta would move as I grew, but unless/until it did, I was told to "take it easy." I could walk, of course, but no running and no lifting heavy things. Depending on how things developed, I could end up on bed rest, and if the placenta didn't move by the final weeks, I would definitely have a c-section. (The placenta did move, and five weeks later I was able to resume normal activities and went on to have a normal, vaginal birth at 40 weeks.)

I took all of this in stride. Despite my love of running, I would do what I needed to do so that my baby (and I) would be healthy and whole at the end of the 9 months. But then, after I asked for additional clarification about my exercise restrictions, my midwife said something to me that still - nearly 5 years later - rankles: "Just stay home, and get fat."

Get fat? Why should I do that? Why would I want to, when I am getting ready to take on the extremely physically and mentally demanding job of raising/chasing/holding/carrying/loving two children? I understood, of course, that I should be growing, getting bigger and rounder. But fat? To me that implied neglecting my health for the next several months - and setting myself up for several months or even years of "getting back in shape" and/or feeling sad about the shape my body was in. It was the first time I realized how strongly I felt, and still feel, about pregnancy as a time to be even more committed to making healthy choices, whether that be signing up for prenatal yoga, taking daily walks, or opting for a bowl of berries over a banana split at the end of the day.

And [NPR](#) reports that recent research backs me up: just last week a study was published in the journal [Cell](#) suggesting women who consumed a lot of fatty foods in the third trimester may be

setting their children up for a higher likelihood of becoming obese. What the scientists actually demonstrated is that the brains of mice pups are rewired by their mother's diets, and that they are less capable of handling glucose and high-fat foods, because the brain's neurons have been impaired. Their brains really were rewired to make it more difficult for their bodies to maintain a healthy weight.

It is true that mice aren't people, but additional research, headed by Harvard University's Dr. David Ludwig and published last October in PLOS, suggests that the mice experiment might have implications in the human world, as well, and that high-fat diets during pregnancy can have a similar effect on human babies. Dr. Ludwig and his colleagues studied more than 40,000 mothers and their children and, controlling for genetics and environment, compared how much weight they gained during pregnancy and how their children fared later in life. Those children born to mothers who gained more than 40 pounds - which is the current recommended upper limit for weight gain during pregnancy - were at higher risk for being overweight or obese.

So clearly "Stay home and get fat" is not sound advice for any pregnant woman - at least not if she is concerned about the future health of her child. And while I recognize that many women don't feel like themselves during pregnancy and cannot muster the motivation, energy or self-control to exercise, and that some women have serious medical issues that prevent them from doing such things, I think it is high time we stop thinking of pregnancy as a time to indulge in ice cream and forgo the gym. Our babies deserve a better start than that.

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