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A new study shows that a low glycemic load diet in overweight and obese pregnant women results in longer pregnancy duration, greater infant head circumference, and improved maternal cardiovascular risk factors.

DURING PREGNANCY, LOW-GLYCEMIC DIETS IMPROVE HEALTH OUTCOMES IN OBESE WOMEN & THEIR INFANTS

Excess body weight is known to complicate pregnancies, but the optimal diet during pregnancy is currently unknown. New research published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition aimed to examine the effects of a low-glycemic load (low-GL) diet in overweight and obese pregnant women.

Researchers randomly assigned 46 overweight or obese pregnant women to receive a low-GL or a low-fat diet. The women received carbohydrate-rich foods, fats, and snack foods through home delivery or study visits. Birth weight, infant body measurements, gestational duration, maternal weight gain, and maternal metabolic parameters were measured.

No significant differences in birth weight or measures of infant body fat were seen between the two groups. However, in the low-GL compared with the low-fat group, gestational duration was significantly longer and fewer deliveries occurred at less than 38.0 weeks (13% versus 48%). Adjusted head circumference was greater in the low-GL versus the low-fat group. Women in the low-GL group had smaller increases in triglycerides and total cholesterol and a greater decrease in C-reactive protein (a marker of inflammation).

In this study, a low-GL diet correlated with longer pregnancy duration, greater infant head circumference, and improved maternal cardiovascular risk factors. Researchers suggest that large-scale studies may be useful in determining whether a low-GL diet may be beneficial in the prevention of prematurity and other unfavorable maternal and infant outcomes.

Rhodes ET, et al. Effects of a low-glycemic load diet in overweight and obese pregnant women: a pilot randomized controlled trial. 2010. Am J Clin Nutr 92(6):1306-15.