

SCIENCE &amp; WELLNESS

# Sugar Intake During Pregnancy Could Trigger Kids' Allergies Later On

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What kind of cravings did you have while you were pregnant?

When I was pregnant with my second, I would walk around at three in the morning eating granola bars because I couldn't sleep and was absolutely starving. I know this wasn't the smartest habit because those granola bars were packed with sugar.

Our doctors warn us about keeping our sugar intake in check during pregnancy to avoid gestational diabetes. Now, a new [study](#) tells us that eating too much sugar may also trigger allergies and asthma in our children down the road.

Researchers from Queen Mary University of London set out to investigate the possible connection between mothers' diets and their children's allergies. They analyzed data gathered from nearly 9,000 mother-child pairs in the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, an ongoing research project that tracks the health of families.



They calculated the amount of free sugars consumed by the women during pregnancy based on their answers to a written survey. Free sugars are naturally present in honey, syrups, and unsweetened fruit juices, as well as those added to food and beverages. They do not, however, include sugars found in whole vegetables and fruits.

The researchers focused specifically on allergies that produce respiratory and skin symptoms. Asthma and allergies are the most common chronic illnesses for children in the United States. The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology reports that worldwide sensitivity to one or more allergens among children is approaching 40 or 50 percent.

Interestingly, the researchers observed that the intake of free sugar and high fructose corn syrup has also increased substantially during this same period.

The research team looked at how the mothers' sugar consumption compared with allergies and asthma diagnosed in the children beginning at age seven. Here is what they found:

- 62 percent of the children did not have any allergic conditions, but the remaining children had one or more maladies or symptoms.
- 22 percent of the kids had a common allergy.
- 16 percent had eczema.
- 12 percent had asthma.
- 11 percent had wheezing with whistling.
- nine percent had hay fever.

Next, the researchers compared the children of moms who ate the least amount of sugar during pregnancy (less than 34 grams, or seven teaspoons, per day) with the children of moms who ate the most (between 82 and 345 grams, or 16 and 69 teaspoons, per day).

The children of women with the highest sugar intake during pregnancy had a 38 percent higher risk of allergy diagnosis. Kids of the moms in this group had a 73 percent increased risk of being diagnosed with an allergy to two or more allergens. The allergic asthma risk increased by 101 percent for children of moms in the high-sugar consumption group. This risk was double that of kids born to women in the low-sugar group.

With such strong results, the team is continuing to examine the issue to try and replicate the findings among additional groups of children. It is unclear from the study findings how strong the effect is, so more studies will be needed to determine if there is a direct causation between sugar intake during pregnancy and children's allergies.

If they do see the results repeated, then the next step will be to design a trial to test whether childhood allergies and asthma can be prevented by reducing the amount of sugar consumed by mothers during pregnancy.

Nonetheless, too much sugar during pregnancy is problematic. Pregnant women should follow the nutrition guidelines from the World Health Organization and the U.S. Department of Agriculture and eat healthy diets to reduce the risk of developing gestational diabetes.

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