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How a Med diet for mums-to-be can keep kids fit

Daily Mail · 16 Mar 2021 · 31 · By Xantha Leatham Health and Science Reporter x.leatham@dailymail.co.uk

EATING plenty of fruit, vegetables and whole grains during pregnancy could help prevent childhood obesity, a study suggests.

It found pregnant mothers who follow a Mediterranean-style diet are more likely to have children who put on weight at a steadier pace compared with those who don't.

In contrast, eating lots of processed meat, sugary drinks and refined grains was associated with faster weight gain in children as young as three, the US researchers said.

A team from Harvard Medical School analysed data from 1,459 mother-child pairs in Boston and tracked their progress as the children grew up.

They studied what the women ate during their pregnancy and regularly recorded the body mass index of their child between birth and adolescence.

A pregnancy diet with 'higher inflammatory potential' – which includes eating a lot of processed meat, sugary drinks and refined grains – was associated with faster BMI growth rates in children between three and ten years old.

The study also found a lower adherence to a Mediterranean-style diet during pregnancy – which is also high in fish, olive oil and nuts – was associated with higher BMI trajectories for their child through adolescence.

The researchers said what a mother eats while pregnant plays a 'pivotal role' in influencing her child's BMI. This could be because their diet may affect the metabolism of the developing child, as well as their eating behaviours and food preferences.

Dr Carmen Monthe-Dreze, lead author of the study, said: 'It is important to counsel women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant on the importance of a healthy diet during pregnancy.'

'In particular, women who are pregnant or may become pregnant should consider a Mediterranean diet, which may not only benefit their own health but may also help their child to maintain a healthy weight.'

She added: 'Research has shown that the foods we eat during pregnancy may influence the metabolism of the growing child as well as their eating behaviours and food preferences.'

'Additionally, the food choices women make during pregnancy are likely to be similar to food choices they offer their children.'

'Therefore, it is conceivable that maternal nutrition during pregnancy may be related to long-term weight issues in the offspring.'

The study, published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, said healthcare providers need to be 'particularly alert' to children at high risk for weight gain based on their mother's dietary habits during pregnancy.

It added more research is needed to understand the relationship between pregnancy diet and child weight gain patterns.

'Long-term weight issues'