

- Women—health and hygiene

Fast food, prunes, dementia: Study shows what foods help women's health

The Jerusalem Post · 2 Aug 2022 · 5 · • By JUDY SIEGEL-ITZKOVICH

There is growing evidence that you are what you eat and that frequent consumption of highly processed “fast food” wreaks havoc on the body. Two new foreign studies, one from China and the other from the US, demonstrate the health damage from junk food.



A diet high in sugar and fat such as hamburgers, french fries and sugary soft drinks can negatively affect a new mother's breast milk and her baby's health – even before the child is conceived – according to a study from the University of Cambridge conducted with colleagues from the University of Chile.

The new study using lab mice has found that even relatively short-term consumption of a fast-food diet impacts women's health, reducing their ability to produce nutritional breast milk after giving birth. This can affect their newborn's well-being, as well as increase the risk of both mother and child developing potentially fatal conditions such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes later in life. Even mothers who appear to be of normal weight can be suffering from complications such as a fatty liver – which is common in people who are overweight or obese – from eating a diet heavy in processed foods. This can lead to advanced scarring (cirrhosis) and liver failure.

The study, published in the journal *Acta Physiologica*, said, “Women's eating diets that tend to have high sugar and high-fat content may not realize what impact that might be having on their health, especially if there's not an obvious change in their body weight,” according to co-lead author Prof. Amanda

Sferruzzi-Perri.

“They might have higher levels of fat mass, which we know is a predictor of many health problems,” she said. “That may not overtly impact on their ability to become pregnant, but could have consequences for the growth of the baby before birth and the health and well-being of the baby after birth.”

In this study, a group of mice was fed a diet of processed highfat pellets with sweetened condensed milk for just three weeks before pregnancy, during the three-week pregnancy itself and following birth. It was designed to mimic the nutritional content of a fast-food meal.

The researchers discovered that even a short-term high-fat, high-sugar diet impacted on the survival of the mice pups in the early period after birth, with an increased loss during the time the mother was feeding her offspring. Milk proteins are hugely important for newborn development but the quality was found to be poor in mouse mothers eating the high fat, high sugar diet.

When a woman of larger size is pregnant, clinicians are often most concerned about the risk of diabetes and abnormal baby growth. But in moms-to-be who look healthy, regardless of their food intake, subtle but potentially dangerous changes in pregnancy may slip under the radar, she said.

“The striking part is that a short exposure to a diet from just before pregnancy that may not be noticeably changing a woman's body size or body weight may still be having implications for the mother's health, the unborn child and her ability to support the newborn later.”

Meanwhile, eating highly processed foods has been connected with an increased risk of dementia, say researchers from Tianjin Medical University in China based on the UK Biobank.

People who eat the largest amounts of ultra-processed foods like soft drinks, chips, cookies, salty snacks, ice cream, sausage, deep-fried chicken and sweet cereals have a higher risk of developing dementia than those who eat the lowest amounts, according to a new study published in *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology. While the study does not prove that ultra-processed foods cause dementia, it does show an association.

“Ultra-processed foods are meant to be convenient and tasty, but they diminish the quality of a person’s diet,” said study author Dr. Huiping Li, PhD, of Tianjin Medical University in China. “These foods may also contain food additives or molecules from packaging or produced during heating, all of which have been shown in other studies to have negative effects on thinking and memory skills.” On average, ultra-processed foods made up 9% of the daily diet of people in the lowest group, an average of 225 grams per day, compared to 28% for people in the highest group, or an average of 814 grams per day.