

High altitude linked to developmental delays

Dec 19, 2012 9:00 AM by Michelle Maffei

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You know that your diet can affect your baby-to-be, but a new pregnancy warning heeds that where you live both during and post-pregnancy is tied to developmental delays too.

SOUTH AMERICAN STUDY SHOWS RISKS

Before you pack up and head for sea level, discover how high altitude is linked to developmental delays.

Altitude research heeds pregnancy warning

In a study published in *The Journal of Pediatrics* and funded by the National Institutes of Health, researchers theorize that the elevation at which pregnant women lived during their prenatal period could also impact the brain of a developing fetus, citing decreased blood flow due to reduced oxygen at higher altitudes. However, this is not the first time that science has pointed the finger at elevation during a child's time in the womb. The Centers found the birth weight and physical development indicators declined significantly as the altitude during womb-time increased. [The study](#) also suggested that reduced growth can also be attributed to altitude of the youngster's residence outside the womb.

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Toddler developmental delays tied to elevation

Researchers also evaluated the brain development of more than 2,000 kids ages 3 months to 2 years old at pediatric offices in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile and Ecuador in 2005 and 2006. Of the South American babies and toddlers studied, those kids living in higher altitude were more likely to score poorly on tests, suggesting that altitude posed developmental delays during this period where the kids grow like weeds. However, not all pediatricians share the same concern.

Pediatricians' take on elevation risks for fetuses and toddlers

While pregnancy warnings and developmental delay scares may have you sending for the moving truck, local pediatricians are less concerned about where you and your baby live both during pregnancy and postpartum. "Living and having adjusted to higher altitude does not commonly cause fetal or childhood problems," assures Dr. Jim Betoni, co-author of the [Pregnancy Power Workbook](#). "Over time, these women's bodies compensate for the decreased available oxygen by increasing their numbers of oxygen-carrying red blood cells."

And although Dr. Elizabeth Lyster of [Holtorf Medical Group](#) concurs, it doesn't give you a free pass to lounge around when living up high during pregnancy. "Although the mom's blood composition will compensate for the 'thinner air,' oxygen gets to the baby by a passive diffusion process, the mom needs to do everything possible to maximize circulation during her pregnancy by keeping her blood pressure good, getting enough rest, etc. If she does well during her pregnancy, altitude should not adversely affect her baby's brain development or mental capacity."

Before you hit the hay, discover how [sleep deprivation can lead to preterm labor](#) >>

Although research has found that high altitude is linked to developmental delays both during pregnancy and throughout a child's toddler years, before you freak out about your next deep breath of fresh mountain air it's important to consider all the dynamics of any research.

"In this study in particular there could easily have been other factors," points out Dr. Lyster. "In South America, living at altitude means living further away from medical care and nutritional resources. Also, there could be a confounding factor of the mother's educational level — this has in fact been shown to correlate with Baby's mental abilities, probably due to: Nutrition, ability to mentally stimulate the infant, etc." While it's true that pregnancy risks and warnings can be scary, your best bet is to follow your OB/GYN's and pediatrician's advice on raising a healthy child, regardless of where you live.