

## **Script – Print – How much is too much?**

### **Study reveals caffeine during pregnancy may impact your child’s height**

If you’re pregnant and looking for a New Year’s resolution, maybe take a look at the amount of caffeine you’re consuming these days.

Children who were exposed to small amounts of caffeine before birth were shorter on average than those who were not, according to a recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

The gaps in height, while not significant, were detected at age 4 through age 8, researchers said. The findings were reported even in the children of pregnant women who consumed less than 50 mg of caffeine per day on average, which is well below the current guidelines.

According to the American Academy of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, pregnant women should consume no more than 200 mg of caffeine a day.

A mug of filtered coffee has about 140 mg. Caffeine is also found in tea, soft drinks, energy drinks, cocoa, chocolate and some medications.

“That is about 12 ounces of coffee a day. So that would be larger amounts of tea, and tea doesn’t have as much caffeine,” says Dr. Jamie Plett, an OB/GYN with OSF HealthCare. “There is some caffeine in chocolate but that’s a negligible amount, typically. But that’s way less than what’s found in energy drinks and things.”

When it comes to growth in children there are, of course, other factors at play including gender, health conditions, nutrition and environmental conditions.

“Obviously genetics is going to be the biggest one as to the height of the child,” says Dr. Plett. “But also, there have been studies before that show that nutrition during pregnancy is going to change the height of the child as well.”

According to the researchers of the most recent study, there is no way to know if the difference in height would continue into adulthood. If it did, the biggest concern would be the possibility of heart disease, obesity and diabetes, which are often associated with smaller stature.

Dr. Plett makes a point of talking with her pregnant patients about caffeine intake during an initial visit and the importance of staying around the 200 mg mark daily.

“It seems like just people are more aware of what they’re putting into their bodies when they’re pregnant,” she adds. “So they think a little bit more about ‘oh, do I really need this extra cup of coffee today?’ So I don’t know that there’s necessarily a decrease in a craving because I think if people are used to drinking that caffeine, they like it. Also, it’s harder to sleep when you’re pregnant. So people sometimes want that extra caffeine because it makes a little bit easier to get through their normal day. But I think people do think about it a little bit more before they ingest anything whether that’s food or drink or whatever during pregnancy.”

Dr. Plett cautions parents not to overthink any one study, and to talk with your provider if you have questions or concerns.

“I think some of it is taking this a little with a grain of salt,” says Dr. Plett. “Knowing that there is still data pending, but knowing that this is a possibility, and all findings in science have to start somewhere. So this may be something just to keep an eye on in the future. Maybe think about that cup of coffee every morning, maybe have one every other day or a couple times a week instead. But I also have found that almost naturally people decrease their caffeine intake in pregnancy. The most common cause I’ve found in headaches early in pregnancy is caffeine withdrawal; they’re so used to having that first cup of coffee and if they don’t have it anymore, it’s pretty common to have those headaches.”

As with any major lifestyle or dietary change, remember to talk with your health care provider first, as changes can affect your mood or medical conditions.