

Researchers in the UK say they have found a link between a woman sleeping on her back during late pregnancy and an increased risk of her suffering a stillbirth.

A team of researchers at Tommy's Stillbirth Research Centre at the University of Manchester interviewed more than 1,000 women - 291 of whom had a stillbirth late in the pregnancy. The women were interviewed about their sleeping positions, along with a number of other factors.

The researchers say their data showed that sleeping on the back more than doubled a woman's risk of late stillbirth. However, according to Dr. Michael Leonardi, a high risk obstetrician and director of obstetrics at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria, while the findings are something to consider, it's not necessarily a cause and effect relationship.

He also points out that researches spoke to the patients on average three to four weeks after their still born baby was delivered.

"People recall things, maybe being prompted by the question that was asked for example," he said. "Because I know if you asked me, did I go to sleep on my left side or my right side or my back 25 days ago, I would have absolutely no idea. So I think we have to keep that in mind."

Dr. Leonardi also says sleep position was not always the only risk factor for the research participants.

"The study also found that obesity was related to still birth, sleep apnea, smoking, all of those things that we really do have control over, more so than did I roll over at night and wake up scared that I hurt my baby."

The researchers concluded that it is possible that late in the pregnancy, when a woman is asleep on her back, the weight of the womb puts pressure on the blood vessels supplying the baby with oxygen. Dr. Leonardi says while blood vessels can be affected by a heavy uterus, a woman's body would alert her to any problems.

"Your body will protect yourself, so if you're flat on your back and you're pregnant enough that the uterus is squishing the blood vessels coming up out of your pelvis so not enough blood is getting to your heart, you will get faint, nauseous and want to throw up before you've cut off blood flow to the uterus and to the placenta," he assured. "Your body will tell you to get into a more favorable position both for you and the baby."

Dr. Leonardi says he hopes this study will spark conversations between physicians and their patients about appropriate sleep practices, both for mom and for infant.

He says patients should do their best to be informed and always ask their physician any questions they have. And while Google can be a good tool, don't let internet diagnoses interfere in your health care or mental well-being.

"I think that well-informed patients are like the best thing that we can have," said Dr. Leonardi. "And what I encourage patients to do is it's always okay to Google things and get not another opinion, but another way of looking at what we've talked about, and that sometimes helps them or prompts them to ask questions that they hadn't thought of the first time around, and so I think that's a great thing."

To read the entire sleep position study, as published in the British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, click [here](#).