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VITAL SIGNS

Gestational Diabetes and Language Delays

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[Gestational diabetes](#) — a condition that develops when women cannot produce enough insulin during [pregnancy](#) — has been linked to a host of problems in their children, including a higher risk of [obesity](#) and [diabetes](#). Now a study finds that these children are about twice as likely as others to have language delays.

The [analysis](#), which appears in the November issue of *Pediatrics*, compared 221 children of diabetic mothers with 2,612 children of nondiabetics. After controlling for the mothers' age, education level, [smoking](#), infant health at birth and other factors, researchers found that of the children who fell below the 15th percentile in at least two tests of language ability between 18 months and 7 years, 26 percent had diabetic mothers, while only 13 percent did not. At all ages, the scientists concluded, gestational diabetes is associated with a deficit in language skills, and the association is stronger than with any other factor except maternal education level.

“It’s surprising that we found that gestational diabetes is such a strong determinant of language development,” said Ginette Dionne, the lead author and a professor of psychology at Laval University in Quebec, “but the delay is not inevitable. We also found that language stimulation given to children can offset some of the risk. This is one of the things we’re testing right now.”

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