

HEALTH BENEFITS OF PREGNANCY**Debosree Ghosh^{1*} and Pratap Parida²**

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ABSTRACT

Pregnancy is a condition which is considered a blessing in a woman's life. Being a mother is said to be an ultimate phase of a woman's life that completes her life. Pregnancy comes with lots of successive changes in the physiology of a woman. Most of these changes are detrimental for the woman and many of these changes are not very pleasant experience. However, the good news is that pregnancy comes with some beautiful experiences as well as some real health benefits for the would be mother. Pregnancy induces some beneficial health changes in the woman.

KEYWORDS: Health Benefits, Physiology, Pregnancy.

Pregnancy Strengthens bones

During pregnancy, calcium supplement and consumption of calcium rich foods for good built of bones of the growing baby enhances the process of strengthening of bones of mother's body. Specially, the hip bones get stronger.^[1] The growing baby derives required calcium for formation of its bones from the mother's body while in her womb. This extra need of calcium is generally met by supplementing calcium under clinical prescription or by adding calcium rich food in daily diet or both. If the baby doesn't get enough calcium, it derives the required amount of calcium from mother's bones. As per the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, calcium absorption is improved during the days of pregnancy in order to meet the increased need of calcium and to compensate for the loss of bone density of women during pregnancy.^[2] Studies show that women who bear baby, have been found to have decreased risk of hip bone fracture in their life time.^[1] Thus, pregnancy is in a way beneficial for strengthening bones in women. It has been found that that stem cells

harvested from pregnant woman's amniotic fluid can be used to treat osteoporosis and strengthen weak bones.^[3]

Makes skin better

Avoiding fast food and adapting healthy food habit during the pregnancy period helps in improving the skin and hair of the would be mother. Inclusion of vitamins, minerals and antioxidant rich foods in diet reduces skin problems and makes the skin of the would be mother better and imparts her the 'pregnancy glow'.^[1] Even the nails are also found to be stronger during pregnancy. Though experience varies from women to women. Some women complain of dull skin and pimples while most women experience trouble free glowing skin during the period of pregnancy. Skin sensitivity increases during pregnancy. Moles are found to be enlarged in some women and some new moles develop in some women. Proper and good food habit anyhow has been accounted for better skin during the period of pregnancy.^[4]

Improves immunity

For years now it is known that the would be mother's immune system gets accustomed to the days of pregnancy. The immune system of the expectant mother adjusts so as to prevent the body from rejecting the growing fetus. Natural Killer cells and neutrophils actions have been found to be increased during pregnancy.^[6] It has also been reported that the early labor may be triggered by inflammatory immune response.^[5] Studies conducted in experimental mice have revealed that the expression of genes that are responsible for coding chemokines get switched off in the tissue around the fetus and placenta thereby turning off certain immune signals, thus preventing the mother's immune system from attacking the fetal cells.^[7] Studies show that the pregnancy hormones help to cure certain chronic pathological conditions in the mother during her days of pregnancy. Unfortunately most such healing are temporary and some are found to be relapsed after few months of giving birth to baby.^[7,8] Conditions like Rheumatoid arthritis have been found to be cured during period of pregnancy and in some women the condition has been found to be completely treated during pregnancy.^[7]

Reduces the risk of cancer

Studies show that women who have been pregnant are less vulnerable to cancer. Pregnancy and breast feeding period reduces number of menstrual cycles in a woman's life. Thus, pregnancy and breast feeding causes reduced exposure of women to endogenous sex hormones, oestrogen and progesterone in her life time. This reduces the risk of occurrence of breast cancer and ovarian cancer in women who have been pregnant in her life time

compared to those who have never been pregnant.^[9,10] Also, pregnancy and breast feeding phases are associated with sequence of hormonal changes in a woman's body which directly influences the maturation, proliferation and differentiation of cells of breast. Studies reveal that those newly differentiated and modified cells are resistant to get converted to cancer cells.^[11,12] It is also reported that women who have given birth to five or more children have significantly reduced risk of breast cancer compared to those women who have not been pregnant.^[13] Surprisingly, it has been found that women who suffer from preeclampsia during the period of their pregnancy, have lowered risk of developing breast cancer.^[14] Women with full term pregnancy have been found to have reduced risk of ovarian cancer^[15], endometrial cancer and other types of cancers also.^[16] Risk of ovarian cancer development decreases proportionately with increase in number of birth given by women.^[17] An interesting finding about ovarian cancer occurrence is that women who conceive and give birth to their first child at an age above thirty years are at reduced risk of developing ovarian cancer compared to those women who give birth to their first child at less than twenty years of age.^[18]

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