





## Are the children of vegetarians more susceptible to autism?

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Getting adequate nutrition is essential for optimal health. This is true no matter how old you are – and it's especially true in the womb. Developing babies must have particular nutrients in order to grow and form properly. But new research suggests that moms who eat a vegetarian diet might be missing a nutrient their child needs to avoid autism.

Several years ago, researchers discovered that children born to moms without sufficient folic acid were more likely to have problems with their brain and spinal cord development. Now, women often take supplements containing folic acid even before they become pregnant. Many manufacturers even add it to their foods to ensure that developing babies get enough of this vital nutrient.

Folic acid is very important. But new research being conducted at Texas A&M University suggests that it may not be the only important nutrient for developing babies. In fact, this nutrient may be vital in protecting unborn babies against certain forms of autism.

*Continued Below...*

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The nutrient is carnitine. It's important because it helps move fatty acids into the mitochondria, where the cells turn the fats into energy. The body can make carnitine on its own. But research has found that a particular gene mutation that hinders carnitine biosynthesis has also been linked to autism. This new research suggests that for these people, their body's inability to produce carnitine prevents neural stem cells from developing properly.

The good news is that it seems that providing the cells with carnitine from an outside source can compensate for their inability to produce it themselves. Pregnant women can consume carnitine from red meat or whole milk or in supplement form. The researchers have noted that it could be possible to test pregnant women for the gene mutation to help determine if carnitine supplementation is needed. But they do caution that there are so many factors involved in the process that it's difficult to know if such a test would allow all women to avoid carnitine deficiencies in their babies.

Autism currently affects approximately one percent of people in the US, so these preliminary findings are encouraging. They suggest that some forms of the condition may be preventable. Most people reading this probably aren't interested in having more children. But this is vital information for anyone you know who is pregnant or planning to become pregnant. They need to consider adding a carnitine supplement to their prenatal vitamin. This is particularly important if they avoid red meat.

Yours for better health,



Frank Shallenberger, MD

Source:

Vytas A. Bankaitis et al. Inborn Errors of Long-Chain Fatty Acid  $\beta$ -Oxidation Link Neural Stem Cell Self-Renewal to Autism. I, January 2016  
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