

Obesity risk for C-section babies: 84% more likely to be overweight than children born naturally

- **Obesity epidemic could in part be driven by increasing rates of caesareans**

By Nick Mcdermott



Weight problems: A study has found a link between caesareans and childhood obesity

Babies born by caesarean section are almost twice as likely to be overweight as children and teens, according to a new study.

After examining the health records of more than 10,000 British children, researchers found that surgically delivered 11-year-olds were 83 per cent more likely to be overweight compared to those born naturally.

The results of the study confirm previous research that also found a link between caesareans and childhood obesity.

Researchers believe that babies by natural childbirth are exposed to bacteria in the birth canal which helps regulate metabolism in later life.

The findings suggests the obesity epidemic could in part be driven by increasing rates of caesareans. The rate in England stands at one in four births, which totals more than 160,000 a year.

Health concerns often dictate whether a women undergoes surgical delivery, which can be life-saving for both mother and child, but in many cases there is no medical reason for the operation.

'There may be long-term consequences [of caesareans] to children that we don't know about,' said lead researcher Dr Jan Blustein, from the New York University School of Medicine. She said the extent of the obesity risk for children is 'not great' and should not be a factor when considering whether a women should have the operation for medical reasons.

[Remove children from criminal families at birth to save them from crime, says top judge](#)

But she said woman who are considering electing caesareans 'should probably know about those risks'.

The team looked at data from a major investigation of childhood development called the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children. This tracks the long-term health and well-being of around 14,000 children born in the early 1990s.

Metabolic speed: One theory for the weight gain is that babies in natural childbirth are exposed to bacteria in the birth canal which helps regulate the metabolism

Just over nine per cent of the children in the study were born by caesarean, and on average were two ounces lighter than those delivered naturally.

But by the age of six weeks, those surgically delivered were consistently heavier than their naturally-born counterparts at almost all points - even when other factors such as their mother's weight and whether they were breastfed were taken into account.

The risk of obesity was particularly marked among children born to overweight mothers, the researchers said.

In total, a third of all the three-year-olds in the study were overweight, while at the age of seven and 15 there was a 17 per cent chance of a child being obese.

The research, published in the International Journal of Obesity, also highlighted the risks to women of undertaking a caesarean including increased chance of bowel or bladder injuries as well as future pregnancy complications.



Warning: Scientists also noted that children with overweight mothers could be more prone to excess weight

Dr Blustein said one reason for the link between caesarean's and obesity could be that these infants are not exposed to beneficial bacteria in the birth canal, and therefore their bodies take longer to accumulate good bugs that boost the body's metabolism.

Obese adults tend to have fewer 'friendly' bacteria in their digestive tract and higher levels of 'bad' bacteria, which mean they burn fewer calories and store more of them as fat.

However, other studies show that obese women are more likely to need a caesarean, and are more likely to have children who grow up to be overweight or obese.

'The other possibilities are (that) these are children that would have been heavier anyway,' Dr Blustein said. 'Being heavy as a woman is a risk factor for C-section, so that's the problem with trying to figure out whether this is real or if it's simply a matter of selection