

A new meta-analysis of 19 European studies shows that women with a moderate fish intake during pregnancy are less likely to experience a preterm birth than women who rarely eat fish.

Moderate fish intake during pregnancy improves fetal health and growth

Although it can be a source of concern due to environmental pollutants, fish intake has long been considered an important source of essential nutrients, especially during fetal development and early childhood.

In a new study published online in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, researchers analyzed the possible association between fish intake during pregnancy and fetal growth, gestation length, and overall health.

The study gathered information from 19 population-based birth studies that included 151,880 European mother-child pairs. Data from the individual studies were gathered, adjusted and standardized using a random and fixed-effects meta-analysis.

Compared to women who rarely ate fish (once a week or less), women who ate fish more than once per week had a lower risk of preterm birth. Women who ate fish more than once/week but less than 3 times per week had a 13% lower risk of preterm birth compared to women who rarely ate fish. Risk reduction was similar in women eating fish more than 3 times a week. Women eating fish more than once/week also gave birth to infants with a higher birth weight independent of gestational age. Fish intake had the most significant effect in infants of smokers and overweight or obese women.

The results of this large population study support the idea that moderate fish intake during pregnancy is associated with a lower risk of preterm birth and improved health and birth weight.

Vasiliki Leventakou et al. Fish intake during pregnancy, fetal growth, and gestational length in 19 European birth cohort studies. First published December 11, 2013, doi: 10.3945/ajcn.113.067421.