

Birth records hold pancreatic cancer clue

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Pregnancies in Jerusalem in the 1960s and 1970s may hold vital clues about how pancreatic cancer and diabetes are linked. According to research published in the online open access journal BMC Medicine, women with a history of gestational diabetes had a higher risk of developing pancreatic cancer later in life.

The research team drawn from the US and Israel and led by M. C. Perrin traced over 37,000 mothers who gave birth between 1964 and 1976 in Jerusalem as part of the Jerusalem Perinatal Study. Birth records revealed 410 women were diagnosed with gestational diabetes in one or more of their pregnancies. Of the 410 women with gestational diabetes, five eventually developed pancreatic cancer. There were 54 cases of pancreatic cancer overall in the cohort; and none of the women with type 1 diabetes at the time they gave birth went on to develop pancreatic cancer.

Those with gestational diabetes often go on to develop type 2 diabetes mellitus. Medical debate surrounds the causal relationship between diabetes and pancreatic cancer. On the one hand, patients with newly diagnosed pancreatic cancer frequently have diabetes of recent onset and when the tumor is removed the symptoms of diabetes often improve. On the other hand, individuals with long standing diabetes have also been shown to be at increased risk of pancreatic cancer. In this study the gestational diabetes clearly came first, between 14 and 35 years before the pancreatic cancer.

Source: BioMed Central

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