

Bariatric surgery linked to safer childbirth for the mother

27 September 2018



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Obese mothers who lose weight through bariatric surgery can have safer deliveries. The positive effects are many, including fewer caesarean sections, infections, tears and haemorrhages, and fewer cases of post-term delivery or uterine inertia. This, according to an observational study by researchers at Karolinska Institutet in Sweden, and published in *PLOS Medicine*.

Today, more than one in every three [women](#) admitted into prenatal care are either obese or overweight, and statistics from the National Board of Health and Welfare show that this is a rising trend.

"We know that obesity and overweight are dangerous in connection with childbirth," says Dr. Olof Stephansson, obstetrician and researcher at Karolinska Institutet's Department of Medicine in Solna. "Bariatric [surgery](#) is by far your best option if you want a lasting weight reduction over time."

The research group to which he belongs has made several studies of [bariatric surgery](#) effects on pregnancy and childbirth. The researchers studied

deliveries in 1,431 women who had achieved considerable weight loss after bariatric surgery and compared them with deliveries in 4,476 women who had not undergone surgery. The women in the control group had the same BMI during early pregnancy as the experimental group had had before surgery.

"The effects were quite salient, and all of those we studied were to the benefit of the women who'd had surgery," says Dr. Stephansson. "There are a lower proportion of C-sections, fewer induced deliveries, a lower proportion of post-term deliveries, less frequent epidurals, and fewer cases of uterine inertia, infection, perineal tears and haemorrhaging."

The comparison was done using the Scandinavian Obesity Surgery Registry (SOReg) and the Medical Birth Registry. The positive effect is thought to be attributable to the considerable weight loss that these women have undergone, on average 38 kilos from the time of surgery to the start of pregnancy. At the same time, earlier studies show that women who have bariatric surgery run a slightly greater risk of pre-term [delivery](#) and having babies that are small for their gestational age.

"It's therefore not as simple as just advising every woman who's overweight to have bariatric surgery," says Dr. Stephansson. "But going by the results of this study, it has positive effects for mothers. More studies are needed in which we weigh up outcomes so that we can give a more general recommendation."

The Swedish studies should also be complemented with similar studies in other countries, he says. Internationally, Sweden stands out in terms of the volume of bariatric surgery performed. "Today, 1 percent of all babies born in Sweden have mothers who have had [bariatric](#) surgery. It might not sound many, but this number is rising. When the women start to lose weight, their fertility quickly recovers,

so this, too, is improved by the operation."

The research is patient-centred and conducted by people with different competencies, including obstetricians, nutritionists, surgeons and epidemiologists. "Thanks to the fact that we combine good study design and method with proximity to clinic and patient, we can also conduct really good studies," says Olof Stephansson.

More information: Olof Stephansson et al, Delivery outcomes in term births after bariatric surgery: Population-based matched cohort study, *PLOS Medicine* (2018). DOI: [10.1371/journal.pmed.1002656](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002656)

Provided by Karolinska Institutet

APA citation: Bariatric surgery linked to safer childbirth for the mother (2018, September 27) retrieved 1 June 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-09-bariatric-surgery-linked-safer-childbirth.html>

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