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Greener Pastures May Give Rise to Smarter Babies

Carolyn Buchanan | Posted: May 17, 2013

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SUMMARY: A new study ties a baby's head size and overall birth weight with the mother's proximity to green space. Greener environments give rise to bigger baby heads and bodies. Although it doesn't divulge the actual reason for the connection, it does suggest that being surrounded by plant life may be beneficial to mother and child.

Researchers from a consortium of Spanish institutions set out to investigate the association between surrounding greenness and birth weight, head circumference, and gestational age at delivery. They looked at 2,393 singleton live births from four Spanish areas located in two regions of the Iberian Peninsula with distinct climates and vegetation patterns over the course of five years.

Their results, published by *Environmental Health Perspectives*, showed higher surrounding greenness was associated with increases in birth weight and head circumference, but not gestational age. The reason this study may be significant is that head circumference has been reported to be an indicator of brain size, and both head circumference and brain size may be predictive of IQ and cognitive ability.

Because about half of the world population lives in cities, and there are some predictions that by 2030 three of every five persons will live in urban areas worldwide, it's more than a curiosity what the health benefits or deficits may be. Previous studies have found benefits between **the health of urban dwellers and green surroundings**. And while none of these studies prove that moving to an area with more green spaces will increase a person's happiness or sense of well-being, previous research has shown that short periods of time in a

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green space can improve mood and mental skills.

The Spanish study also suggests that the beneficial health impacts of residential green space exposure may come from increased physical activity, reduced stress and depression, enhanced social contacts, and reduced noise and air pollution levels that pregnant women (and all people) may experience in green spaces.

Of course, there are many factors that contribute to **fetal weight gain**, and to be reassured that your baby is on track, be sure to make regular visits to your health care provider. She can keep you advised of your baby's growth.

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Carolyn Buchanan



B.C. (before children), Carolyn was trained as a journalist — a generalist journalist. Now as a parent, she experiences news differently. What was once an item of passing interest, i.e. "Toy Train Runs on Lead Paint" or "Midnight Release Planned for Latest Power Rangers Movie" now consumes her life. Still she trains her eye to find the family relevance in everything new, and that's what she endeavors to share with you here. As a parent, and a writer for *What to Expect*, she will be your family-news filter (with a personal twist).

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