

Research Warns Against Ginseng During Pregnancy

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Recent studies published in the September 2003 issue of *Human Reproduction* cause concern with the use of ginseng during the early stages of pregnancy.

Research from the Chinese University of Hong Kong showed malformations in rat embryos exposed to ginsenoside Rb1, one of the principal active components of ginseng. Embryos exposed to high doses exhibited significantly shorter body lengths, fewer muscle cells, and decreased heart, limb and eye development.

Ginseng, according to researcher Dr. Louis Y. Chan, is used to enhance stamina and cope with the fatigue and physical stress experienced during pregnancy.

"Pregnant women might take ginseng because they think it is good for their pregnancy and may not be aware that there could be unknown harmful effects," said Dr. Chan. "Before more information in humans becomes available, women should be cautious about using ginseng in the first three months of pregnancy, and it is always advisable for pregnant women to consult their doctor before taking any herbal supplement."

Surveys indicate that over 9 percent of pregnant women report using herbal supplements. In Hong Kong alone, over 55 percent of women utilize herbal medicines.

Further investigation is needed to determine if ginseng can cause fetal abnormalities in humans. Although results from animal studies do not always reflect the circumstances in humans, researchers say, pregnant women should be cautious about using the herb, especially during their first trimester.

References

1. An in-vitro study of ginsenoside RB1-induced teragenecity using whole rat embryo culture model. *Human Reproduction* Sept. 25, 2003;18:266-2168.
2. 2. Researchers urge caution over using ginseng in early pregnancy. Science Daily news release, Sept. 25, 2003.

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