Don't Eat Your Baby's Placenta, Please And Thank You

By Ana-Marija Dolaskie — July 13, 2017

Of all the fads to cling to, let's not jump on the bandwagon of this one, okay? Especially when scientific bodies and a government agency like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns you not to [1].

The warning comes after the extensive investigation of an Oregon baby that suffered a severe bacterial infection — which causes problems like sepsis, pneumonia, and meningitis — and spent time in a neonatal intensive care unit. The cause was eventually traced back to his mother's placenta pills, which were contaminated due to improper sterilization.

"In this case, heating for sufficient time to a temperature adequate to decrease GBS (group B Streptococcus agalactiae) bacterial counts might not have been reached. Consumption of contaminated placenta capsules might have elevated maternal GBS intestinal and skin colonization, facilitating transfer to the infant," the CDC said in the statement.

The placenta is an organ that supports the fetus in the womb providing nutrients, blood, and oxygen to the unborn baby. After the baby's birth, the placenta is expelled from the uterus. At which point, mothers have an option to keep it, or discard. And some choose to ship it off to a company found on the internet and pay good money to encapsulate it. The process involves dehydrating the placenta, grinding it up, and converting it into about 200 capsules. The latest trend — touted by many Hollywood celebrities — is believed (by those without any scientific evidence) to be beneficial to both mom and baby. According to AmericanPregnancy.org [2], ingesting your placenta can:

- Increase in CRH, a stress-reducing hormone
- Decrease in post-partum depression [3] levels
• Restoration of iron levels in the blood
• Increase in milk production

Sounds appealing, but the website quickly caveats that "The few scientific studies conducted on placental encapsulation have not conclusively supported the effects of this practice."

The animals are doing it

Advocates of placenta eating (and there are plenty) say that the practice has been around for centuries, including in animals. The act of mammals eating the placenta after childbirth is called Placentophagy [4]. It is believed that placentophagy occurs among animals to hide any trace of childbirth from predators in the wild. It is also a custom 'cleanup' practice for herbivores, not a postpartum benefit.

Chinese practice

Human placenta has been an ingredient in Chinese medicine for centuries, using dried placenta known as Zīnèché, to ward off disease, infertility, and impotence, and various other conditions. But the limited evidence that it works has scientists puzzled as to why so many Western mothers are intrigued by the practice.

Experts — and we here at ACSH — caution that moms could be doing their babies more harm than good. Since companies that perform this practice are not regulated, the placenta pills could be carrying some harmful bacterial hosts, like GBS.