Fear of Large Babies Increases Unnecessary C-Sections

written by Beth Mark | January 19, 2016

For almost all women, the idea of childbirth is daunting. When your doctor tells you that your baby is measuring big, delivery anxiety can worsen. But what if those worries could be avoided? And what if the consequences of a misguided weight prediction can be serious? According to a new study, a significant amount of women are told their babies are growing "quite large" prior to birth. Consequently, the research shows that mothers who believed they were having large babies were almost five times more likely to ask for a scheduled C-section. What's most alarming is that the vast majority of these women went on to deliver babies who weighed less than 8 pounds 13 ounces, which is the medical definition of a large baby. The study was based on a nationally representative survey of 1,960 new mothers.

With cesarean section birth rates skyrocketing in recent years – according to the CDC, nearly one in three babies in the United States is born via C-section – this is important information to recognize. Equally important for parents and care providers to keep in mind is that ultrasound scans used to predict birth weight are not reliable.

Although the potential risks for large babies delivered vaginally can be serious and should not be entirely neglected (particularly for women with gestational diabetes), the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)

cautions the use of ultrasound scans to estimate fetal weight. ACOG guidelines from 2014 state that a suspected large baby is only “rarely” an indication for a cesarean delivery. A wider picture of national data also provides insightful information: fewer than 8 percent of babies born meet the medical definition of a large baby.

A care provider purely counseling women on a cesarean section can cause confusion, exacerbating pre-existing concerns about a long or painful birth process; it can sway women into considering an option that sounds medically necessary, but wasn’t an initial consideration. When it comes to the birth of your baby, knowing the risks and realities of choices made available to you is key. Knowledge can provide the power to become your best advocate.