Acanthosis nigricans among women with gestational diabetes and risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes

Julie Daitchman, MD
Marian J Vermeulen, BScN MHSc
Joel G Ray, MD MSc

1 Division of Endocrinology and Metabolism, University of Toronto, Toronto Ontario
2 Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario
3 Obstetrics and Gynecology and Health Policy Management and Evaluation, St. Michael’s Hospital, University of Toronto, Toronto Ontario

Correspondence to
Dr. J. Ray
Medicine
St. Michael’s Hospital, University of Toronto
E-mail: rayj@smh.toronto.on.ca
Acanthosis nigricans (AN) is a cutaneous manifestation of insulin resistance (1). Among women with gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) it is not known whether AN is associated with greater need for insulin therapy in pregnancy or adverse perinatal outcomes.

We performed a prospective cohort study of consecutive women with GDM or impaired glucose tolerance (IGT) and a singleton pregnancy referred to the Diabetes in Pregnancy Clinic at St. Michael’s Hospital in inner city Toronto, Ontario. Patients received dietary counseling and began blood glucose testing four times a day. At the initial Clinic visit, each woman was examined for AN of the neck. All outcomes were adjusted for maternal age, pre-pregnancy body weight, parity and maternal birthplace outside of North America.

There were 44 women with, and 46 without, AN. The mean (SD) pre-pregnancy weights were 63.6 (16.1) and 68.9 (17.9) kg, and 66% and 59% were born outside of North America, respectively ($\chi^2$ test, $p = 0.52$). Of all women born outside of North America, approximately 42% were of East Asian, 31% South Asian, 18% African or Middle Eastern, 8% Hispanic and 1% White European ethnicity.

Prior to delivery, women with AN received 8.2 (95% confidence interval [CI] -3.4 to 19.7) more units per day of insulin than women without AN, and more required treatment with insulin (57% vs. 30%; odds ratio [OR] 2.6, 95% CI 0.91 to 7.4). Women with AN delivered 1.1 (95% CI 0.39 to 1.7) weeks earlier than unaffected women, and more often by primary Cesarean section (39% vs. 20%; OR 3.6, 95% CI 1.1 to 11.9). There was no significant difference between women with and without AN in terms of gestational age-adjusted birthweight (-53.0 g, 95% CI -254.9 to 148.9), but infants born to women with AN spent about 0.70 (95% CI 0.27 to 1.1) days longer in hospital than those born to mothers without AN.
Our study was small in size, performed in a single centre. We did not define AN in a standardized manner, which may have been wrongly distinguished from normal skin pigmentation, including that altered by pregnancy (2). Women with AN were more likely to be delivered by planned Cesarean section -- perhaps reflecting the tendency to perform operative deliveries in women taking insulin (3).

AN may be a marker of pronounced insulin resistance (1), including obese women with GDM. Herein, women with AN weighed more and were nearly twice as likely to require insulin therapy, and at a higher daily dose. AN can be readily assessed in most clinical settings (1); however, it must be determined if this sign predicts the onset of GDM or insulin requirements in pregnancy. Future research may consider measuring the homeostasis model assessment of insulin resistance among GDM-affected women with and without AN.

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REFERENCES

