

When Wellness Fads Turn Dangerous: The Reality of Placenta Pills

From Gwyneth Paltrow to Kourtney Kardashian, numerous celebrities have endorsed the rejuvenating benefits of placenta consumption. However, recent incidents involving critically ill infants due to Group B Streptococcus (GBS)-contaminated placenta pills have raised significant concerns, prompting health authorities to issue stark warnings against this practice.



Mother and Baby Health Risks

The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a warning against the consumption of placental capsules following a [2016 case report](#) that highlighted the severe health risks associated with this practice. This warning was based on multiple cases where

newborns developed severe bacterial infections, leading to critical health conditions. It was determined that the bacteria, [Group B Streptococcus](#) (GBS), was transmitted to the infants via the mother's breast milk, which became contaminated after she ingested the infected placental capsules.

GBS is a type of bacterial infection that can be particularly harmful to newborns. When an infant contracts GBS, it can lead to life-threatening conditions like meningitis, sepsis, and pneumonia. [Meningitis](#), an inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord, is especially dangerous for infants, who are particularly vulnerable due to their immature immune systems. Meningitis can result in long-term neurological damage or even death, making any potential exposure to GBS a critical health risk.

Understanding the Transmission

The process of how GBS infects infants through placental capsules involves several stages. Initially, the placenta, which is rich in blood and nutrients, can become contaminated with GBS either during delivery or during the handling and processing of encapsulation. When a mother consumes these capsules, the bacteria can colonise her gastrointestinal tract. From there, GBS can spread to other parts of her body, including the mammary glands.

During breastfeeding, the bacteria can be transferred from the mother's milk ducts into the breast milk itself. As the infant ingests the contaminated milk, the bacteria enter the baby's digestive system. Given the underdeveloped immune system of newborns, the bacteria can quickly spread from the digestive tract to the bloodstream, leading to systemic infection. This pathway explains the high risk of severe infections like meningitis in infants who are exposed to GBS through contaminated breast milk.

Scientific Evaluation of Placenta Consumption

Despite these warnings, many mothers continue to consume placenta capsules, often motivated by anecdotal reports of benefits such as reduced postpartum depression and bleeding, improved

mood and energy levels, and enhanced milk supply. However, scientific research does not support these claims.

A notable study conducted in [2015](#) aimed to evaluate the purported health benefits of placenta consumption. The researchers systematically reviewed the available literature and concluded that there is no scientific evidence supporting any health benefits of placenta consumption for either the mother or the baby, even among animal species. This study underscores the lack of empirical support for the purported advantages of this practice.

Further research has focused on the microbiological safety of placenta encapsulation. One study found that placental tissue can harbour various bacterial species, including pathogenic ones like GBS. The methods used to process the placenta—such as steaming and dehydrating—are not always sufficient to eliminate all bacterial contaminants. This finding raises serious concerns about the safety of consuming placental capsules, especially for breastfeeding mothers.

Regulation and Safety Concerns

The most common method of placenta preparation involves creating capsules from the placenta post-delivery. Some individuals have also consumed placenta by frying it into meals or blending it into smoothies. Over the past decade, celebrity endorsements have fuelled a trend where companies offer placenta encapsulation services, claiming to provide a convenient and "mess-free" option. These companies typically steam, dehydrate, and process the placenta into capsules, sometimes even adding flavours like bubble gum, and charge substantial fees for these services.

However, these companies often operate without stringent health and safety regulations, resulting in capsules that can harbour numerous bacterial species. Unlike pharmaceutical products, which are subject to rigorous quality control and safety standards, placenta encapsulation services are largely unregulated. This lack of oversight means that there is no guarantee that the processes used to prepare the placenta are adequate to ensure the elimination of harmful bacteria.

In numerous [documented cases](#), mothers have consumed placental capsules that were contaminated with GBS. After ingesting the capsules, the bacteria colonised the mother's body and were subsequently transmitted to their infants through breastfeeding. The newborns developed severe GBS infections, in some leading to meningitis- a critical health condition that required intensive medical intervention.

Main Takeaway:

The current scientific evidence does not support the consumption of the placenta for health benefits. In fact, the practice poses significant risks, particularly to infants. The lack of regulation in placenta preparation further exacerbates these risks. Given the severe health implications and the absence of proven benefits, it may be time to reconsider and abandon this celebrity-driven wellness trend.

Health experts emphasise the importance of following evidence-based guidelines for postpartum care and nutrition. New mothers should consult healthcare professionals for safe and effective ways to support their recovery and their baby's health. The allure of celebrity-endorsed wellness trends should not overshadow the paramount importance of safety and scientific validity in healthcare practices.

Ultimately, while the notion of placenta consumption may appeal to those seeking natural and holistic approaches to postpartum recovery, the potential dangers highlighted by recent GBS outbreaks cannot be ignored. The wellbeing of both mothers and their infants must take precedence, guided by rigorous scientific research and sound medical advice.