Fetuses need oral cues, not stressed out moms

Chennai: Baby showers are becoming increasingly popular the world over, but doctors say there is a scientific reason behind the tradition of gifting bangles to pregnant women during baby showers in India: The fetus craves acoustic stimuli.

“Bangles are gifted to the women during the baby shower because the tinkling of the bangles provides acoustic stimuli for the baby,” said Dr Geetha HariPriya, gynaecologist and chairperson of Prashanth Hospitals. Studies have shown that cheerful or calming music reduces a pregnant woman’s stress and depression and helps the fetus develop the ability to hear.

A stressed out pregnant woman is more likely to give birth to a pre-term or underweight baby, gynaecologists say.

Doctors who attended the launch of a special programme for pregnant women, ‘Thaamai’, at Isha Argya Centre on Sunday, said mental relaxation and physical exercise are more effective than any medicine they could prescribe for moms-to-be.

Doctors say constant stress causes havoc with because hormones released due to mental strain causes intrauterine growth restriction that decelerates fetal growth.

“I first became pregnant at 33. I was trying to balance family life and career and that left me completely stressed. My daughter weighed just 1.6kg when she was born,” said Dr Anjaliakshmi, head of SRM Medical College’s department of gynaecology and obstetrics. “Three months later I conceived again, but this time I was relaxed. My son was 3.4kg when he was born.”

“Working women have to deal with deadlines and may forget to eat on time. They are also prone to anxiety which compounds the problem. The fetus suffers due to inadequate nutrition and the baby will be underweight as a result,” said Dr Kalaiselvi, president of the Obstetric and Gynaecological Society of Southern India (OGSSI).

The doctors stressed on the importance of physical activity that relaxes a pregnant woman’s pelvic muscles and ligaments to make delivery easier. “Many expectant women are sedentary and physical activity is limited. This can create complications during delivery,” Dr Kalaiselvi said. Doctors say there has been a steady increase in caesarian deliveries, many of which could have been avoided if the woman’s body was better prepared for childbirth.