

## When Girls Make Their Mothers Sick

Few pregnant women escape the well-meaning chums who insist they can tell a baby's sex from various telltale signs -- like the height of the mother's belly or the foods she craves.

And those pals are right -- about half the time anyway. Now, British doctors report that male and female fetuses really can affect mothers differently. Asthmatics carrying girls are more likely to find the symptoms worsen, probably because of tiny hormone changes, researchers suggested last month in the *British Medical Journal*. One hormonal change occurs about midterm among women carrying boys, said Dr. Heather Milburn, who studied 34 asthmatics. But what happens among girls' mothers is not known, she said. Dr. Milburn said doctors had long noted the effect on asthmatic moms: "Roughly, a third get worse, a third get better and a third stay the same. But researchers still aren't sure why." Dr. Emil Skobeloff, who has studied women with asthma in Philadelphia, said larger studies were needed to assess the findings, because it was hard to tell whether female fetuses made asthma worse, or male fetuses made it better. The American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology stresses controlling asthma in pregnancy. It says inhaled medicine is usually safe during pregnancy and suggests avoiding asthma triggers like pets and pollen.