Reproduction Smelliness: Garlic, Fenu-Greek, Fluids

Research about food odors transmitted via pregnant women
compiled by Otto Didact, Improbable Research staff

Garlic Ingestion and the Odor of Amniotic Fluid

“Garlic Ingestion by Pregnant Women Alters the Odor of Amniotic Fluid,” Julie A. Mennella, Anthony Johnson, and Gary K. Beauchamp, Chemical Senses, vol. 20, no. 2, April 1995, pp. 207-209. The authors, at Monell Chemical Senses Center, Philadelphia, report:

Amniotic fluid samples were obtained from 10 pregnant women undergoing routine amniocentesis procedure.... Randomly selected pairs of samples, one from a woman who ingested garlic and the other from a woman who ingested placebo capsules, were then evaluated by a sensory panel of adults. The odor of the amniotic fluid obtained from four of the five women who had ingested the garlic capsules was judged to be stronger or more like garlic than the paired samples collected from the women consuming placebo capsules.

Peculiar Odours in Newborns: Spicy Food


Four cases of newborn infants with peculiar smells are described. In two, the sharp odour was identified as cumin, one smelled of fenu-greek and one of curry. All these babies were born to mothers who ingested spicy food prior to delivery. In one case, the foul-smelling amniotic fluid led to a spurious suspicion of amniotitis.

Reproductive Sniffing, Long Unassessed

“Sperm-Activating Odorous Substances in Human Follicular Fluid and Vaginal Secretion: Identification by Gas Chromatography–Olfactometry and Ca2+ Imaging,” Constanze Hartmann, Annika Triller, Marc Spehr, Ralf Dittrich, Hanns Hatt, and Andrea Buettner, ChemPlusChem, vol. 78, no. 7, July 2013, pp. 695–702. (Thanks to Veronique Greenwood for bringing this to our attention.) The authors, at University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Ruhr-University, RWTH-Aachen University, and Fraunhofer Institute for Process Engineering and Packaging, all in Germany, report:

Fluids of the female reproductive tract have so far—to the best of our knowledge—not been investigated for odor molecules.