

Moms on Antidepressants Have Babies with Malformed Brains

'What's astounding is that this study is basically receiving no media attention'

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Almost one in five children born to mothers taking antidepressants during pregnancy have a brain defect – called a “Chiari type 1 malformation” – according to a groundbreaking study by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The study, titled [Rate of Chiari I Malformation in Children of Mothers with Depression with and without Prenatal SSRI Exposure](#), was published May 19 in the peer-reviewed journal [Neuropsychopharmacology](#).

The researchers found that “children of depressed mothers treated with a group of antidepressants called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) during pregnancy were more likely to develop Chiari type 1 malformations than were children of mothers with no history of depression,” according to their press statement.

So-called SSRI antidepressants encompass almost all of today’s major brands, including Prozac, Paxil, Luvox, Zoloft, Celexa and Lexapro. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2010 an astonishing [254 million prescriptions for antidepressants were written for Americans](#). And [between 7 and 13 percent of all pregnant women in the U.S. are currently taking them](#), even though virtually [every study performed to date demonstrates that mothers taking SSRIs – especially in the first trimester of pregnancy – significantly increase the risk of their giving birth to children with autism](#), as well as other disorders and birth defects.

In a Chiari type 1 malformation (pronounced key-are-ee), brain tissue in the cerebellum – which controls a person’s balance, coordinate on, muscle movement and some cognitive functions – squeezes out into the spinal canal. While some people never develop noticeable symptoms, others experience symptoms including dizziness, headaches, balance and coordination problems that in serious cases require surgery.

A child with a Chiari type 1 malformation “might fall down a lot, walk unusually, have trouble grasping items, or have poor hand-eye coordination,” according to one [advocacy organization](#), which lists as other possible symptoms: “neck or chest pain; headaches that are brought on by coughing, sneezing, or laughing; difficulty swallowing, which may cause gagging, choking, or vomiting; difficulty speaking; rapid eye movements or vision problems like light sensitivity or blurred vision; hearing problems like a tinnitus (ear ringing) or hearing loss; weakness, numbness, tingling, or other abnormal feelings in the arms and legs; insomnia; and depression.”

In babies, indications of a Chiari malformation could include “irritability when being fed; excessive drooling; weak cry; trouble gaining weight; arm weakness; and developmental delays.”

Regarding the University of North Carolina study, “Our results can be interpreted two ways,” says Rebecca Knickmeyer, Ph.D., lead author of the study and assistant professor of psychiatry at UNC’s School of Medicine. “Either SSRIs increase risk for Chiari type 1 malformations, or other factors associated with SSRI treatment during pregnancy, such as severity of depression itself, increase risk.” Additional research, she adds...

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