

Study links antidepressants to foetal brain damage

February 23, 2004

Pregnant women who use Prozac and similar drugs to combat depression could be damaging the brains of their unborn babies, according to research.

A US study has found direct evidence linking foetal exposure to Prozac with disrupted neurological development. Abnormal sleeping patterns, heart rhythms and alertness levels were linked to drugs called selective-serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs), of which Prozac is one.

Research leader Philip Zeskind, professor of pediatrics at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, said: "We've found SSRIs disrupt the neurological systems of children... and we're talking about hundreds of thousands of babies being exposed to these drugs during pregnancy."

His team compared 17 babies born to women who took antidepressant drugs throughout their pregnancy with 17 babies born to mothers who had never taken such drugs. The women were of similar age and class.

The researchers found that the drug-exposed babies were more tremulous, slept more deeply and showed "fewer of the... changes in heart rate that normally occur in newborns".

A spokesman for Lilly, the manufacturer of Prozac, said that concerned patients should read the label on its drug packets. This states that studies on pregnant women "do not indicate a teratogenic (foetus-damaging) effect".

- Telegraph>