

Depressed feelings during pregnancy affect baby

Study in Obstetrics & Gynecology shows relationship between depression and negative birth outcome

Depression or depressed feelings during pregnancy can lead to a bad start for the child, such as a premature birth. Researchers of Radboud university medical center found that this was true for both women who were treated with antidepressants and those who received no medication. The researchers did a large meta-analysis in which they examined the individual data of 400,000 women internationally.

About ten percent of women experience depression or depressive feelings during pregnancy. Epidemiologist Marleen van Gelder of Radboud university medical center: "We noticed that socially there is a lot of attention for postpartum depression, so when the baby is born. Feelings of depression during pregnancy are less visible, but our study shows that a significant group of women suffer from it and that this can have consequences for the baby."

For this study, data from over 400,000 participants from 27 different studies were pooled and analyzed to gain more insight into the relationship between depressive symptoms during pregnancy, antidepressant use, and the risk of a number of common negative health outcomes for the baby: preterm birth, low birth weight (less than 2,500 grams), low weight relative to the duration of pregnancy, and a low Apgar score (a test that measures the health of the baby immediately after birth).

It appears that women with (symptoms of) depression have an increased risk of preterm birth and a baby with a low Apgar score, even if no antidepressants were used. The use of certain antidepressants gave even a slightly higher risk. No increased risk of having a child with a low birth weight or a weight too low for the duration of the pregnancy was found, either in the group of women who did not use or did use antidepressants.

Marleen van Gelder: "Based on these results, we conclude that depression during pregnancy should not go untreated, since most of the risks were also seen among women with depression who had not used antidepressants. This information can help health care providers and pregnant women make the choice of whether the positive effects of treatment outweigh the potential risks to the unborn child."

About the study in Obstetrics & Gynecology
Associations Between Maternal Depression, Antidepressant Use During Pregnancy, and Adverse Pregnancy Outcomes: An Individual Participant

Data Meta-analysis - Richelle Vlenterie, Marleen M. H. J. van Gelder, [...],
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