Today’s piece was prepared by Katharine Boyle, MD based on an April 16, 2012 *New York Times* article, “Hazards: Poor Health in Pregnancy Linked to Delays.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/17/health/research/diabetes-or-obesity-in-pregnancy-tied-to-developmental-delays.html>

This article presents findings from a case-control study published in *Pediatrics* that investigated the relationship between obesity and diabetes during pregnancy and developmental delays and autism in childhood. The *Times* article describes the study, which included 517 children with autism, 172 with developmental delays and 415 healthy controls. It controlled for several factors such as maternal race and education. The conclusion presented here is that “compared with healthy women with a body mass index under 25, children of obese mothers or those with diabetes had more than double the risk of impairments in language, motor and social skills, and a more than 50 percent greater risk of autism.”

The article suggests that obesity increases the risk of autism by 50% without explaining what a 50% increase means for an individual family. There is no statement about the ages of the children studied (which is important, since the likelihood of diagnosis is highly variable when comparing younger children with older children). In addition, no context is given for our current understanding of autism and whether this finding is actually new.

The resources below shed light on the current research into autism spectrum disorders and provide further context. Because the underlying causes of ASDs stem from complex and interrelated variables, a growing body of research is investigating genetic and environmental risk factors. Maternal obesity and the resulting inflammation is one proposed risk factor, and the *Pediatrics* study supports that relationship.

**RESOURCES ON AUTISM FOR PARENTS:**

Autism Speaks: What is Autism?

<http://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/faq>

“A Parent’s Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorder”

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/a-parents-guide-to-autism-spectrum-disorder/index.shtml>

**RESOURCE ON AUTISM FOR CLINICIANS:**

CDC website for Autism Spectrum Disorders, section on research and tracking

<http://www.cdc.gov/NCBDDD/autism/research.html>

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!