Today’s piece was prepared by Jason Espinoza, MD, based on a CBS News article [Study finds link between autism and mother's antidepressant use](http://www.cbsnews.com/news/is-there-a-link-between-autism-and-mothers-antidepressant-use/)

This article summarizes a new cohort study in JAMA Pediatrics linking the use of antidepressants during the second and third trimester with an increased risk of developing autism. The study found the risk of autism was higher in mothers who took an SSRI, and estimated around 13% of pregnant women in America take antidepressants. The study examined 145,000 children and included information on maternal use of SSRIs and eventual diagnosis of autism. Average age found of diagnosis was 4.5 years and in all 1,054 children were diagnosed with autism. In the observational analysis, researches concluded that antidepressant exposure in utero during second or third trimester increased the relative risk of autism by 87%. While striking, the author is appropriate in pointing out the prevalence of autism in the general population is only about 1 to 1.9%.

The author appropriately notes that while the study adds to evidence about environmental factors linking to an autism diagnosis, there are flaws to these types of observational studies. In addition, she notes how it is difficult to find a causal relationship between SSRI use directly affecting risk of autism, or whether maternal mental illness is a contributing factor. Experts from the field are interviewed and noted to explain that while there is uncertainty in absolute safety of SSRI use during pregnancy, the risk of failing to treat moderate to severe during pregnancy also comes with consequences. The article explores the growing and often editorialized research about prenatal factors that might contribute to an autism diagnosis, but errs on the side of caution – giving readers a lens through which they should objectively evaluate studies such as this one published in JAMA Pediatrics. The article ends with a reminder to readers that women should consult with their physicians and weigh the risks as well as potential benefits to any medications taken during pregnancy.

**RESOURCES ON PREGNANCY, LACTATION AND MEDICATIONS:**

[CDC Pregnancy and medications](http://www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/meds/index.html) – *resource for pregnant mothers*

[Lact Med](http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/newtoxnet/lactmed.htm) – *database of drug safety during breastfeeding*

[Genetics of Autism](http://wn.com/genetics_of_autism) – Several videos (brief and long); various professionals

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