

Mothers taking antidepressants (SSRI and similar drugs) in pregnancy

Is it important to treat anxiety and depression in pregnancy?

It is important for the health of parents and babies that depression and anxiety is treated effectively as this improves the outcome for the babies. Ideally treatments should be decided with your doctors before pregnancy, but certainly before birth, and this discussion should include advice on breastfeeding.

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are a class of drugs that are typically used as antidepressants in the treatment of major depressive disorder and anxiety disorders.

How common is withdrawal from SSRIs?

Babies whose mothers/birthing parent are on commonly prescribed antidepressants - known as SSRIs (and similar medications) become used to the drug in their system before birth and can show withdrawal symptoms after birth. Withdrawal is quite common, with about three babies in every 10 showing withdrawal symptoms. These occur particularly in the first two days of life, and occasionally for longer.

The symptoms of withdrawal include jitteriness, agitation, feeding and breathing difficulties. Most of these are mild and the babies improve without any treatment. Rarely more severe problems occur (about 1 in 300 babies withdrawing) including drowsiness, dehydration, convulsions and low blood sugars - when medical help should be sought immediately.

Are there other serious complications?

There is a small risk of a serious condition affecting blood flow to the lungs, called persistent pulmonary hypertension, this requires urgent medical attention. A new large study has shown that the risk is very small and having the oxygen saturation test after birth will identify most babies with this condition early.

How common is withdrawal from SSRIs?

Published guidance recommends a hospital birth to allow for early assessment of your baby, followed by 48 hours of hospital observation. If there are no other medical concerns you are able to birth in the Haven Birthing Suite if you wish to.

Before being discharged from hospital a midwife will check:

- the newborn and infant physical examination (NIPE) has been completed
- oxygen saturation screening to detect early pulmonary hypertension has taken place
- there are no additional concerns about the baby
- feeding is going well
- there is adequate support at home, as well as access to a telephone and transport

Once at home, if you have any queries or concerns, telephone the Postnatal Ward at Poole Hospital on **0300 019 2519**.

If you take SSRIs and are planning a home birth, your midwife or the neonatal team will discuss your baby's individual care requirements and make a plan of care with you.

Other useful resources

BUMPS (Best Use of Medicine in Pregnancy) UK Tetralogy Information Service (2022)
Available from: www.medicinesinpregnancy.org/Medicine--pregnancy

MIND Antidepressants in Pregnancy (2022)

Available from: www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/antidepressants/antidepressants-in-pregnancy

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