

Are Ultrasounds Causing Autism in Babies?

Written by Jennifer Margulis, Ph.D.

Sunday, 01 December 2013 00:00 - Last Updated Friday, 21 March 2014 10:28

Scientists are uncovering disturbing evidence that those sneak peeks at baby could damage a developing brain.

Toward the end of my first pregnancy, a doctor ordered an emergency ultrasound because she believed I was measuring small. She turned to go to her next client before I could talk to her about it, muttering that she suspected intrauterine growth retardation, or IUGR.



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My husband and I sat in the waiting room, flooded with anxiety. It was fine. It wasn't until years later when I started researching and I learned that ultrasound scans have not been shown to be any more effective than intrauterine growth restriction (doctors these days try to avoid ultrasound palpation of the pregnant woman's abdomen by an experienced clinician).

The same summer my daughter was born, Marsden Wagner, an obstetrician and former director of Women's and Children's Health at the World Health Organization. There is no justification for clinicians using routine ultrasound for the management of IUGR.

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experience intrauterine growth restriction, a scary combination of words that means the fetus is not developing normally. Ironically, intrauterine growth restriction is one of the conditions that having multiple ultrasounds is supposed to detect

Although the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that obstetricians discuss normal advantages and disadvantages of having an ultrasound scan with pregnant patients, ACOG does not explicitly recommend normal screening. [redacted] explains that ultrasound may reduce fetal mortality rates because women who discover they are carrying fetuses that are incompatible with life will often choose abortion, but [redacted] also specifies that ultrasound has not been proven to be effective for reducing infant mortality in any other way.

Their policy statement continues: Screening detects multiple gestations, congenital anomalies, and intrauterine growth restriction, but direct health benefits from having this knowledge currently are unproven. Normal decision ultimately rests with normal physician and patient jointly.

The authors of the definitive, exhaustive, [redacted], 85-page textbook for obstetricians, Williams Obstetrics, take a similarly conservative stance about ultrasound and do not explicitly recommend it for low-risk pregnancies: Sonography should be performed only with a valid medical indication, normal authors write, and with normal lowest possible exposure setting to gain necessary information.

Yet doctors and other birth providers take great exception if low-risk pregnant women refuse to be scanned. In 2004 when Lia Joy Rundle, mom of three from Mazomanie, Wisconsin, was just a few weeks pregnant with her second child, she changed insurance providers. Her new obstetrician reviewed her paperwork. "We might be able to do a quick ultrasound today, if the machines are available," she said. "Then you can take a look at your baby."

Though they were planning to have a 20-week ultrasound, Lia and her husband saw no benefit to doing an early ultrasound and felt there might be some risk. But when they declined normal scan, her obstetrician insisted there was no way to get an accurate due date without it. "Look at him, he's fine," she scoffed, pointing at their 1-year-old son. "How many ultrasounds did you have with him?"

But as I uncovered when I was researching my book, The Business of Baby, there is mounting

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evidence that overexposure to sound waves or perhaps exposure to sound waves at a critical time during fetal development is to blame for the astronomical rise in neurological disorders among America's children.

In 2006, Pasko Rakic, M.D., a neuroscientist at Yale University School of Medicine, found that prenatal exposure to ultrasound waves changed the way the neurons in mice distributed themselves in the brain. Rakic and his team do not fully understand what effect the brain. al

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Among the most sensitive cells? Those stem cells in the brain that divide and migrate.

Casanova's hypothesis: Prolonged or inappropriate ultrasound exposure may actually trigger these cells to divide, migrate and form too many minicolumns. They divide when they're not supposed to and there are no inhibitory cells to contain them.

There are more neurologically damaged children in the United States today than ever before. As

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