

Placenta seen to yield clues to autism

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Researchers at Yale University medical school say the placenta may yield clues to problems that lead to onset of autism, a developmental disorder.

The findings, reported in the June 26 online issue of *Biological Psychiatry*, could help physicians diagnose the condition at birth rather than the age of 2 or older, the school said in an announcement.

In most cases, the researchers say autism sets in early in infancy, but information regarding this has been limited. They say the earlier a diagnosis is made, the greater the treatment impact.

The ideal time for diagnosis would be at birth, says Dr. Harvey Kliman, the study's lead author. In previous work, he had observed an unusual pathologic finding in the placentas from children with Asperger Syndrome, an ASD condition which, like autism, impairs the ability to relate to others, the announcement said.

"By serendipity, at a dinner party I happened to sit next to George M. Anderson, a research scientist in the Yale Child Study Center who had access to many cases of children with ASD," said Kliman. "We realized that by working together we might be able to determine if this placental abnormality could be a useful clinical marker."

The Yale team plans to replicate the evaluation with larger multi-center and prospective studies.

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