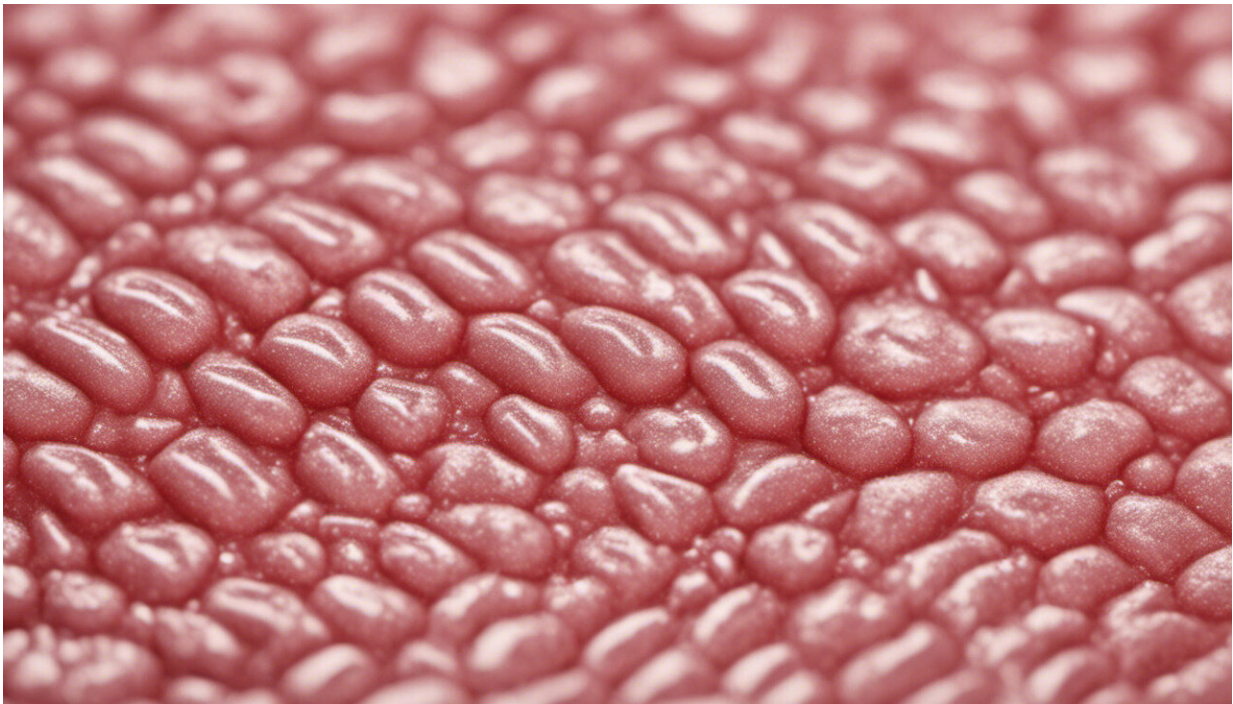


Bowel deformity cleared as cause of developmental delays

December 21 2015, by Kerry Faulkner, Sciencenetwork Wa



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Children born with gastroschisis, where the bowel is outside of the abdomen at birth, develop normally neurologically and psychologically despite being exposed to risks linked to abnormalities.

This finding, based on recent research, is [good news](#) for parents of

[children](#) born with the defect who may have feared it could result in delayed development later in life, King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women and UWA neonatologist Emma Harris says.

It is estimated that 2.4 in 10,000 births in WA are children with [gastroschisis](#) which is almost always detected at the 18 week pregnancy scan.

Certain drugs like amphetamine and cocaine have been implicated as causing the defect but Dr Harris says that's not always the case.

Sometimes it's just an isolated problems with the foetus that has no explanation, she says.

Treatment in the past has been immediate surgery, however, more often now the exposed bowel is covered allowing it to gently reduce over a few days which is better tolerated by the babies with fewer complications.

More than 90 per cent of infants survive following this treatment.

There are several reasons why children's neurological development could potentially be hindered by gastroschisis, Dr Harris says.

The types of risk factors that can cause neurodevelopment concerns in infants include being born to young mothers and being exposed to drug use antenatally and postnatally.

They are also frequently delivered preterm which brings with it the added risk of abnormalities.

Recent animal and human studies have also highlighted the potential for anaesthesia and surgery in babies to result in neurodevelopmental delay.

The recent research focused on a group of 42 children aged five to 17 whereas previous studies investigated children up to age three.

Her research assessed the children's intellectual ability, neurological status, hearing, vision, behavioural status using standard tests.

She says the findings fit with previous studies on younger children.

"The children that have had significant developmental follow-up had all fairly normal outcomes and some delays have been caught up later in childhood," she says.

"Our testing showed that some were at risk of psychological illness more than the population, like hyperactivity and emotional problems.

"If we'd had a control arm we could have teased out whether this could be attributed to socio-economic factors compared to the actual disease itself."

This article first appeared on [ScienceNetwork Western Australia](#) a science news website based at Scitech.

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