

Prenatal drug exposure linked to sleep problems in children

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In the first study across time into late childhood of the effects of prenatal drug exposure on sleep, prenatal drug exposure is associated with greater sleep problems in children. In addition, nicotine has a unique effect, and early sleep problems predict later sleep problems, according to a research abstract that will be presented on Tuesday at SLEEP 2008, the 22nd Annual Meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies (APSS).

The study, authored by Kristen Stone, PhD, of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, We investigated reports across time of 139 mothers regarding the sleep of their children – from 18 months to nine years of age. Of these children, 23 had no prenatal drug exposure, 55 were exposed to cocaine alone or in combination with other drugs, and 61 were exposed to drugs other than cocaine.

According to the results, children with prenatal drug exposure – nicotine, alcohol, marijuana, opiates, or some combination of these – experienced greater difficulty sleeping than unexposed children. Analyses revealed that prenatal nicotine exposure predicted difficulty sleeping above and beyond the other substances. Early sleep problems also predicted later sleep problems.

“Studying the effects of prenatal drug exposure on sleep may provide clues regarding how drugs affect the developing brain and may explain some of the effects of prenatal drug exposure on other outcomes, such as behavior and attention,” said Dr. Stone. “For example, studies show that

adolescents with prenatal nicotine exposure are more likely to start smoking earlier than their peers, but we don't know what other factors, such as sleep, might be involved in that relationship.”

It is recommended that infants (three to 11 months) get 14 to 15 hours of nightly sleep, while toddlers get 12 to 14 hours, children in pre-school 11-13 hours and school-aged children between 10-11 hours.

It is important to make sure that your child gets enough sleep and sleeps well. The value of sleep can be measured by your child's smiling face, happy nature and natural energy. A tired child may have development or behavior problems. A child's sleep problems can also cause unnecessary stress for you and the other members of your family.

Parents who suspect that their child might be suffering from a sleep disorder are encouraged to consult with their child's pediatrician or a sleep specialist.

Source: American Academy of Sleep Medicine

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