

# Preemies may have psychiatric problems as adults

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Credit: Anna Langova/public domain

The good news is that people born as extremely low birth weight babies are less likely than others to have alcohol or substance use disorders as adults. The less encouraging news is that they may have a higher risk of other types of psychiatric problems.

A study by McMaster University researchers, published in the journal *Pediatrics* today, also found that extremely low birth weight babies whose mothers received a full course of steroids prior to giving birth are at even greater risk for [psychiatric disorders](#).

"Importantly, we have identified psychiatric risks that may develop for extremely low birth weight survivors as they become adults, and this understanding will help us better predict, detect and treat mental disorders in this population," said Dr. Ryan Van Lieshout, lead author of the study and a professor of psychiatry and behavioural neurosciences for the Michael G. DeGroote School of Medicine at McMaster.

The study involved 84 adults who were born

weighing less than 1,000 grams (two pounds, 2 ounce), and 90 normal birth weight babies. All were born in Ontario between 1977 and 1982.

The research found that in their early 30s, those low birth weight babies are nearly three times less likely to develop an alcohol or [substance use disorder](#). But, they were two and a half times more likely than adults born normal birth weight to develop a psychiatric problem such as depression, an anxiety disorder or attentive-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

However, those extremely [low birth weight](#) babies who received a full course of life-saving steroids before birth as part of their treatment had even higher odds (nearly four and a half times) of those same [psychiatric issues](#), and they were not protected against alcohol or substance use disorders.

Provided by McMaster University

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