Paternal Exposures

According to a recently published fact sheet from the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS), there may be important risk factors associated with the issue of paternal exposure. The following questions were considered by OTIS:

- **What is a paternal exposure?** A paternal exposure is anything the father of the baby is exposed to before or during his partner’s pregnancy. This includes things such as alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, and prescription or over-the-counter medications.

- **Do paternal exposures before or at the time of conception cause birth defects?** Some exposures may cause changes in a man’s sperm. At this time, there is no evidence that paternal exposures at the time a pregnancy is conceived increase the risk of having a child with a birth defect.

- **Do paternal exposures during a woman’s pregnancy cause birth defects?** A father does not share a blood connection with a pregnancy, so medications or chemicals that are in his body do not get to the developing baby. Substances that a father is exposed to may be found in small amount of semen. It is not expected that sexual intercourse during pregnancy would result in a high enough exposure to the pregnancy woman to increase the risk of birth defects.
Can the father’s use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs affect a pregnancy? These substances can affect the sperm but none are associated with an increased risk for birth defects.

For more information regarding paternal exposures and pregnancy, please visit OTIS’ website at www.OTISpregnancy.org. For further information regarding this article or other prenatal exposure issues, please contact Karen Kuehn Howell, Ph.D., at the Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development Project, Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, 1256 Briarcliff Road, M.E.,320W, Atlanta, Georgia, 30306. You can also phone us at 404-712-9800 or visit our website at http://www.emory.edu/MSACD.

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