ADHD and Pregnancy

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Women, ADHD, and Pregnancy

- ADHD estimated to affect 4.4% of adults in the United States
- Growing appreciation that girls with ADHD have a substantial likelihood of continuing to have the disorder in adulthood
- No studies have evaluated the course of ADHD across pregnancy and the postpartum
- Possible that the perinatal period has an impact upon the course
- Treatment decisions impacted by pregnancy

ADHD = attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.
Does Pregnancy Typically Affect Neurocognition, Memory, and Executive Functioning?

• Debatable
• Widespread belief that there is a syndrome of “pregnancy brain” with memory impairment
• Subjective reports
• Some studies suggest impaired functioning
  – Results are inconsistent
  – No clear relationships between changes in any one hormone and cognition during pregnancy
• Inconsistent findings suggest impairments are subtle and unlikely to be experienced universally by pregnant and postpartum women
• Possible that women with preexisting ADHD may be vulnerable subgroup for cognitive worsening during pregnancy

Treatment Considerations

• Variable risks of stopping medication
  – In general, stimulants have greater efficacy than non-stimulant medications
  – Importantly, some patients are at risk of motor vehicle accidents
    • Driving capability is a key functional outcome
  – Occupational or school functioning

• Recommendations to reduce workload
• Increase structure and organization at work or school
• Employers may be able to offer accommodations

Stimulants in Pregnancy

- Stimulants often represent drugs of abuse
- Data suggest a potential impact upon fetal growth, rather than risk of teratogenicity
- First trimester methylphenidate exposure does not appear to increase the risk of congenital abnormalities
- Report of decreased body weight among pregnant animals exposed to methylphenidate
- Impact on fetal growth, dependent on timing of exposure
- Breastfeeding considerations

Behavioral Teratogenicity

- Animal studies suggest that prenatal exposure to amphetamines is associated with changes in dopaminergic transmission and receptor expression, post-pubertal behavioral changes (decreased motor activity)
- Studies in humans are lacking
- Outcomes after prenatal cocaine exposure, after controlling for confounding variables
  - Children have generally not been found to have consistent impairment on standard cognitive tests and visual habituation, language development
  - In later childhood, heaviest maternal use of cocaine was associated with subtle deficits in executive function

Thank you!
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