

NEWS

Anorexia before or during pregnancy linked to having a child with autism

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Women with **anorexia nervosa before or during pregnancy** have an increased chance of having a child with autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, according to a new study.

About **20 percent of people** with anorexia — an eating disorder marked by food restrictions, low body weight and an intense fear of weight gain — are autistic, but estimates vary. Prior work has suggested that anorexia and autism could share genetic roots, but many studies have looked at the connection only in people actively seeking treatment for an eating disorder, making it hard to control for confounding factors such as medication use.

The new study drew from a large dataset: nearly 53,000 children born in Sweden between 1990 and 2012. About 8,800 of those children were born to women with anorexia, bulimia or an **unspecified eating disorder** — such as overeating or malnourishment — before or during pregnancy.

Those who had anorexia during pregnancy were four times as likely to have a child with autism, compared with women who had never had an eating disorder. The odds of having an autistic child were 80 percent higher among women who had recovered from anorexia nervosa prior to pregnancy.

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