

# Do mothers who are anxious during pregnancy have inattentive children?

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## Abstract

### BACKGROUND:

Maternal somatic anxiety during pregnancy may affect neural foetal development via corticoid pathways. Using a large epidemiological cohort, this study explores the relationship between maternal somatic anxiety in pregnancy and child scores on the Test of Everyday Attention in Children (TEA-Ch).

### METHODS:

Linear regression was used to analyse the association of maternal somatic anxiety during pregnancy and performance of children on three subtests of the TEA-Ch at age 8.5 years that assess selective attention (Sky Search), sustained attention (Sky Search Dual Test) and attentional control (Opposite Worlds).

### RESULTS:

Children with complete data on each subtest were included in the analysis, comprising 4,198 children for the Sky Search subtest, 3,845 for the Sky Search Dual Test and 4,202 for the Opposite Worlds subtest. No association was found between exposure to maternal somatic anxiety and child's performance in any of the TEA-Ch subtests either before or after adjusting for confounders. The results did not change when stratifying by gender.

### LIMITATIONS:

Selective attrition, lack of sensitivity of tests and lack of adjustment for the postnatal environment are possible limitations to this study.

### CONCLUSIONS:

We found no evidence of an association between exposure to maternal somatic anxiety in pregnancy and TEA-Ch scores. These results suggest that anxiety during pregnancy does not affect the development of children's attentional skills measured by TEA-Ch.