

Drinking even small amounts of alcohol while pregnant 'can affect child's IQ'

By Mail Today Reporter

Even small amounts of alcohol consumed during pregnancy can adversely impact the IQ of a child, new research shows.

Drinking by pregnant women has been a controversial topic, with no scientific unanimity. While some experts propagate total abstinence from alcohol, others have favoured moderate consumption. The new study, which used a genetic approach to study the impact of alcohol, has concluded that children whose mothers consumed alcohol during pregnancy had lower IQ when they were eight, compared to kids who were not exposed to any alcohol in the womb.

Even small amounts have adverse effect on kids IQ

Researchers from the universities of Bristol and Oxford used data from over 4,000 mothers and their children to arrive at the conclusion. The study will be published in scientific journal PLOS ONE on Thursday.

In order to separate the impact of alcohol from other lifestyle factors such as smoking and diet, the researchers used genetic data.

They found that four genetic variants in alcohol metabolising genes among 4,167 children studied were strongly related to lower IQ at age eight.

There was no effect seen in children whose mothers abstained during pregnancy, Dr Ron Gray from University of Oxford who led the research said.

When a person drinks alcohol, ethanol is converted to acetaldehyde by enzymes.

Variations in the genes that 'encode' these enzymes lead to differences in the ability to metabolise ethanol. In 'slow metabolisers', peak alcohol levels may be higher and persist for longer than in fast metabolisers', scientists explained.

It is believed that the fast' metabolism protects against abnormal brain development in infants because less alcohol is delivered to the fetus.