

## Stressful pregnancy 'programmes' babies to be anxious

Being stressed in pregnancy genetically programmes the developing baby to be more susceptible to anxiety and behavioural problems in life, according to research.



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3:00PM BST 19 Jul 2011

The link between stressed-out mothers and their offspring is well known, but this study has found the association is not just down to 'nurture' alone.

Researchers discovered that children of mothers who were the victims of domestic abuse while pregnant were genetically different, when it came to their stress response.

Helen Gunter and Thomas Elbert from Konstanz University in Germany found that maternal stress affected the development of the glucocorticoid receptor (GR) gene, which is critical in reacting to stress. The study is published in the journal *Translational Psychiatry*.

Dr Carmine Pariante, from the Institute of Psychiatry at Kings College London, commented: "What this study really adds is an elegant confirmation that this biological change only occurs when maternal stress is present in pregnancy.

"This confirms that pregnancy is uniquely sensitive to a challenging maternal psychosocial environment – much more than, for example, after the baby is born."