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Testicular Cancer Linked to Abnormal Development in the Womb, Doctors Find

By Jason Gale - Aug 29, 2010

Testicular cancer may be linked with abnormal fetal development, according to scientists who have developed a model to investigate how human testes develop in baby boys while they are in the womb.

Until now, it has been impossible to study testicular development during pregnancy in humans and the discovery will enable researchers to understand the processes that can lead to the onset of testicular germ cell cancer in young adult life, and how factors, such as common environmental chemicals, might play a role, the scientists said in a statement.

The research was carried out by Rod Mitchell, clinical research fellow at the U.K.'s Medical Research Council's Human Reproductive Sciences Unit at the University of Edinburgh, and was published online in the journal *Human Reproduction* Aug. 4.

“There is now overwhelming evidence that growth and development in fetal life play a fundamental role in determining the future risk of a wide range of common diseases in later life,” said Richard Sharpe, a principal investigator at the unit. “Male reproductive disorders fall into this category, in particular testicular germ cell cancer, the commonest cancer of young men in their 20s and 30s. We know it originates because of abnormal fetal germ cell development and this then leads to tumour formation in young adulthood, but how and why things go wrong with development of some of the germ cells in foetal life is unknown -- and inaccessible for direct study for obvious reasons.”

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