

## **Women and Depression – Full Disclosure of Drug Risks Required**

Women who find themselves at crossroads in their life in terms of career and family often find themselves depressed and looking for help which often leads to the use of antidepressants. In fact, women between the ages of 25 and 44 incur a higher rate of depression than any other group with some estimating that 1 in 10 women in America are taking antidepressants. The most widely prescribed antidepressants belong to a class of medication known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), and include such well known antidepressants such as Prozac, Zoloft and Paxil.

Although SSRIs have been known to help some when combined with therapy and exercise, women of this age have the added complexity of potentially risking the health of a yet unborn child with the use of SSRIs. And the awful truth is that most women don't know of these risks.

It is imperative that women in this age group get full disclosure of the risk of fetal birth defects. In order to do a proper risk-benefit analysis of whether SSRI's are an appropriate answer for their symptoms.

Certainly, women are not lacking in information about the "benefit" side to this analysis. One only needs to turn on the TV for a short period of time before coming across a well produced SSRI commercial showing depressed people (the majority of which are women) finding their way towards sunshine through the use of a miracle pill. After a complete change in life-style of the commercial actor, women are then encouraged to "ask your doctor about (fill in the blank) medication."

But, what about the other side of this analysis? Are manufacturers advertising or otherwise warning about the "risk" women in child-bearing years take when they use SSRI's? Sadly, these same manufacturers who continue to increase their budgets for consumer-directed advertising of these drugs do not spend nearly the same amount of time/effort warning of the risks. Does a few seconds of rattling off risks at the end of a well-produced TV commercial actually get public attention when they are played underneath the visual of a day at the park? It is highly unlikely.