


New prenatal testing can detect more genetic problems

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 A new method of prenatal testing that can detect more genetic problems in a fetus than ever before could be headed toward wider use after encouraging results from a clinical trial, researchers said.

The study, which is expected to be published in a peer-reviewed medical journal soon, found that the new technique, microarray, surpassed standard testing in detecting chromosomal abnormalities that can cause problems like [autism](#) or [mental retardation](#).

The new technique still requires fetal cells to be obtained either by amniocentesis, in which a long needle is stuck into the womb, or by another invasive procedure called [chorionic villus sampling](#), in which tissue is taken from the placenta. But instead of then examining the fetal chromosomes under a microscope, a DNA-sensing chip is used to detect abnormalities too small to be seen.

A big concern, however, is that it is not always possible to tell whether a small abnormality detected by the chip will be harmful to a child, or if so, how severe such a problem will be. That can cause anxiety for expectant parents and make it difficult to decide whether to terminate a [pregnancy](#).

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