

A patch works for babies

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A SIMPLE skin patch that releases the "sleep hormone" could soon be a game-changer for newborns starved of oxygen during birth, after Australian researchers found it could reduce the risk of brain damage during labour.

Oxygen deprivation at childbirth, or perinatal asphyxia, kills one million babies globally each year and is the leading cause of birth injuries such as cerebral palsy and intellectual disability.

A team from the Ritchie Centre at the Hudson Institute of Medical Research in Melbourne, funded in part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, is working to understand the injury that occurs during birth asphyxia.

In their latest study on animals, they found that delivering antioxidants to a newborn as soon as possible after birth could reduce the amount of oxidative stress causing the brain cell death.

In newborn lambs, researchers tested the effect of multiple melatonin skin patches for the first 24 hours after birth, compared with four hours of intravenous melatonin treatment starting 30 minutes after birth.

Associate Professor Suzanne Miller said the patch and IV melatonin were able to reduce brain cell death, compared with the animals receiving no treatment, and their functional outcomes improved.
