8 Conclusion

It is generally thought that females are much less sensitive to reproductive toxicity of phthalate esters than males. However, as the present results indicate, adverse responses can also be induced in female offspring after *in utero* and lactational DEHP exposure. The age at puberty onset (vaginal opening) in female offspring was significantly delayed at doses that induced similar effects in males (Andrade *et al*., 2006a). Moreover, changes in brain aromatase activity were observed in both sexes at similar doses (Andrade *et al*., 2006b). However, the reproductive endpoints investigated during adulthood were largely unaffected in female offspring. At this period, the only effect observed was a significant increase in the number of ovarian tertiary atretic follicles at the highest dose tested (405 mg DEHP/kg/day). This is in contrast with the results obtained with adult male offspring which showed adverse testicular effects at doses as low as 15 mg DEHP/kg/day (Andrade *et al*., 2006c). Taken together, these results indicate that although changes were seen in both young male and female offspring at similar doses, adult female offspring appear less sensitive to persistent effects on the reproductive system than adult male offspring.