



TAKING MEDICINE DURING PREGNANCY

We hear so much in the news about the dangers of medicines for unborn babies. Because of these concerns, many women suffer through colds and headaches without any medicine at all. Some medicines are safe to take when pregnant, and some are not. This handout answers the most frequently asked questions about taking medicines during pregnancy.

Which Drugs Are Safe?

The US Food and Drug Administration has a safety class system for all medicines. Medicines are classified by category; they may be category A, B, C, D, or X. These categories refer to what we know about the effect a medicine has on a developing baby during pregnancy.

- **Category A**—Studies have been done with pregnant women. There is no known risk to the growing baby.
- **Category B**—Studies have been done with pregnant animals and shown no risk, but there are no studies in women; OR studies in animals showed some risk, but studies in pregnant women did not find any risk.
- **Category C**—Studies done with pregnant animals show some risk, but there are no studies in women; OR no studies have been done in animals or humans, so the risk for a pregnant woman is not known. Medicines in this category are often prescribed during pregnancy if you need the medicine. Even though studies have not been done on the medicines in this class, most of them have been used by pregnant women for years without any problem.
- **Category D**—Studies have shown this medicine can harm a developing human baby during pregnancy. However, there are benefits of these drugs for mothers who have a serious illness. This may make them worth taking in spite of the risk. If you need a medicine in this class, your health care provider will talk to you about the pros and cons for both you and your baby.
- **Category X**—Studies have shown these medicines can harm developing human babies during pregnancy. There is no benefit to the mother that makes taking these drugs worth the risk.

What Are the Category X Medicines?

Some of the most common medicines in the Category X list are hormones, isotretinoin (for acne), angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors, streptomycin, warfarin, lithium, and tetracycline. This list also includes alcohol (beer, wine, and hard liquor) and illegal drugs like cocaine. Most of these medicines can cause harm to your baby.

Are There Some Times in Pregnancy When it is More Dangerous to Take Medicines?

Your baby is developing most rapidly in the first 15 weeks of your pregnancy. This is the time you most want to avoid being exposed to anything that could harm your baby. To be safe, check with your health care provider before taking any medicine at any time during your pregnancy.

I've Been Taking Medicines That My Health Care Provider Gave Me Before I Got Pregnant. Can I Keep Taking Them?

If you are taking medicine and thinking about getting pregnant, talk with your health care provider. If you are taking medicine and just found out you are pregnant, tell your health care provider as soon as you know you are pregnant. Some medicines are so important to your health that you will need to keep taking them. Some medicines can be changed to a lower dose or different medicine to cut down on the risk to your baby.

Are Medicines I Can Buy Without A Prescription (Over-the-Counter) Safe to Take During Pregnancy?

Some medicines that you can get over-the-counter are safe to use during pregnancy and some are not recommended. Check with the pharmacist or your health care provider before you take anything. This handout lists the most common over-the-counter medicines that are safe to use during pregnancy.

What to Do First**If You Have a Cold**

Get plenty of rest. Drink lots of fluids. Wash your hands a lot. Use a saline nasal spray during the day and rub Vicks on your chest and on your throat before you go to bed at night to clear your stuffy nose. Gargle with warm salt water and drink honey with lemon for a sore throat. Rub a little Vaseline inside your nose to keep it from chapping.

Headaches

Drink plenty of water – at least 6 big glasses a day. Eat small amounts all day long instead of 3 big meals – to avoid low blood sugar. Get someone to massage your neck and shoulders for you.

Yeast Infections

Don't douche.

Allergies

First, use the home remedies listed under "colds".

Heartburn

Eat 5-6 small meals per day and do not lie down right after eating. Avoid foods that are acidic (like tomatoes, fruit drinks, spicy foods, fried foods). Drink or eat something soothing like milk, before you lie down. Try chewing gum after eating.

Constipation

Drink more fluids – at least 6 big glasses of water a day is best. Eat lots of fruit and vegetables for bulk.

Diarrhea

Drink lots of clear liquids.

If you Need to Take Medicine

Stuffy nose: chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton) or pseudoephedrine (Sudafed).

A nasal spray may work well and little drug will get to your baby.

Use oxymetazoline (like Afrin or Vicks Sinex) or phenylephrine (like Dristan).

If you use a medicated nasal spray, stop after 3 days. Using it for a longer time may cause your stuffy nose to get worse!

Cough: Guaifenesin and dextromethorphan (like Robitussin DM).

Try to choose a cough syrup with the lowest amount of alcohol.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is best during pregnancy.

Don't take ibuprofen (Motrin), naproxen (Aleve), or aspirin.

Use a vaginal cream like clotrimazole (Gyne-Lotrimin) or miconazole (Monistat).

Use an antihistamine like Benadryl or loratadine (Claritin). Some antihistamines have alcohol included, so check labels.

If you need an antacid, take a chewable tablet that has calcium (Tums) or magnesium (Maalox).

Don't take antacids that have aspirin (Alka-Seltzer, Pepto-Bismol) or soda bicarbonate (baking soda).

Stool softeners like (docusate sodium) Metamucil (psyllium) are safe in pregnancy.

Don't take mineral oil or Senokot.

If you have diarrhea for more than one day, call your health care provider.

Kaopectate and Imodium are safe in pregnancy.

FOR MORE INFORMATION**Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS)**

Information on the effects of drugs, chemicals, and other exposures on mothers and babies during pregnancy. Fact sheets can be downloaded from the OTIS Web site (<http://www.otispregnancy.org/>) or you can call toll-free (866) 626-6947 for more information.

Motherisk

Motherisk offers information about the effects of medicines during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Fact sheets about many concerns during pregnancy can be downloaded from the Motherisk Web site (<http://www.motherisk.org/index.jsp>). Each fact sheet lists which drugs are safe and which are not. You can also call Motherisk toll-free at (877) 327-4636 (for information on alcohol and substance use) or (800) 436-8477 (for questions about morning sickness).

This page may be reproduced for noncommercial use by health care professionals to share with clients. Any other reproduction is subject to JMWH approval. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, JMWH suggests that you consult your health care provider.