Pregnancy and Medications
Frequently Asked Questions

Most of the time, medicine a pregnant woman is taking does not enter the fetus, but sometimes it can. This may cause damage or birth defects. The risk of damage being done to a fetus is the greatest in the first few weeks of pregnancy. This is when major organs are developing. If you are taking any prescription, over-the-counter or herbal medicines, it is best to talk to your caregiver about the medications you are taking before getting pregnant. If you become pregnant, stop taking over-the-counter and herbal medications right away. Tell your caregiver what you were taking. Also, tell him/her medications, if any, you took before knowing you were pregnant. Never take any drugs during pregnancy unless your caregiver gives you permission.

Other things like caffeine, vitamins, herbal teas and remedies can affect the growing fetus. Talk to your caregiver about cutting down on caffeine. Also, ask what type of vitamins you need to take. Never use any herbal product without talking to your caregiver first.

MEDICINES THAT ARE NOT SAFE TO TAKE DURING PREGNANCY

- **Category A** - drugs that have been tested for safety during pregnancy and have been found to be safe. This includes drugs such as:
  - Folic acid.
  - Vitamin B6.
  - Thyroid medicine in moderation or in prescribed doses.
- **Category B** - drugs that have been used a lot during pregnancy and do not appear to cause major birth defects or other problems. This includes drugs such as:
  - Some antibiotics.
  - Acetaminophen (Tylenol®).
  - Aspartame (artificial sweetener).
  - Famotidine (Pepcid®).
  - Prednisone (cortisone).
  - Insulin (for diabetes).
  - Ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) before the third trimester. Pregnant women should not take ibuprofen during the last three months of pregnancy.
- **Category C** - drugs that are more likely to cause problems for the mother or fetus. It also includes drugs for which safety studies have not been finished. The majority of these drugs do not have safety studies in progress. These drugs often come with a warning that they should be used only if the benefits of taking them outweigh the risks. This is something a woman would need to carefully discuss with her caregiver. These drugs include:
  - Prochlorperzaine (Compazine®).
  - Sudafed®.
  - Fluconazole (Diflucan®).
  - Ciprofloxacin (Cipro®).
  - Some antidepressants are also included in this group.
- **Category D** - drugs that have clear health risks for the fetus. They include:
  - Alcohol.
  - Lithium (used to treat manic depression).
  - Phenytoin (Dilantin®).
  - Most chemotherapy drugs to treat cancer. In some cases, chemotherapy drugs are given during pregnancy.
- **Category X** - drugs that have been shown to cause birth defects. They should **never** be taken during pregnancy. These include:

- Drugs to treat skin conditions like cystic acne (Accutane®) and psoriasis (Tegison® or Soriatane®).
- Thalidomide (a sedative).
- Diethylstilbestrol or DES.

No medication is considered 100% safe to take when pregnant because everyone reacts to drugs differently.

Aspirin and other drugs containing salicylate are not recommended during pregnancy, especially during the last three months because it can cause bleeding. In rare cases, a woman's caregiver may want her to use these types of drugs under close watch. Acetylsalicylate, a common ingredient in many over-the-counter painkillers, may make a pregnancy last longer. It may cause severe bleeding before and after delivery.

SHOULD I AVOID TAKING ANY MEDICINE WHILE I AM PREGNANT?

Whether or not you should continue taking medicine during pregnancy is a serious question. However, if you stop taking medicine that you need, this could harm both you and your baby. Talk to your caregiver about if the benefits outweigh the risk for you and your baby.

Pregnant and nursing women who need medication for psychiatric conditions should consult with their obstetrician, pediatrician and mental health care provider before taking any medication.

NATURAL MEDICATIONS OR HERBAL REMEDIES WHEN YOU ARE PREGNANT

While some herbal remedies claim they will help with pregnancy, there are no studies to prove these claims are true. Likewise, there are very few studies to look at how safe and effective herbal remedies are during pregnancy. **Do not** take any herbal products without talking to your caregiver first. These products may contain agents that could harm you and the growing fetus. They could cause problems with your pregnancy.

If you think or know that your mother took diethylstilbesterol (DES), a factory made estrogen, when she was pregnant with you, talk with your caregiver right away. Ask her or him about:

- What types of tests you may need.
- How often they need to be done.
- Anything else you may need to do to make sure you do not develop any problems.

A woman whose mother was given DES when pregnant should be followed and screened for abnormalities of her female organs all through her life.

OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATIONS THAT ARE SAFE TO TAKE DURING PREGNANCY:

Any medication taken during pregnancy should be taken **only** with the permission of your caregiver.

- Allergy (Benadryl®).
- Cold and Flu, Tylenol (acetaminophen). Tylenol Cold, warm salt water gargles, saline nasal drops.
- Constipation (Metamucil®, Citrucil®, Fiberall/Fobricon, Colace®, Milk of Magnesia® , Senekot®).
- Diarrhea (Kaopectate®, Immodium®, Parepectolin). You should not take these in the first trimester and only take the medication for 24 hours. Call your caregiver if you still have the diarrhea.
- Headache (Tylenol).
- Ointment for cuts and scrapes (J & J, Bacitracin®, Neosporin®).
- Heartburn (Maalox®, Mylanta®, Tums®, Riopan®, titralac™, Gaviscon).
- Hemorrhoids (Preparation H®, anusol, tucks®, Witch hazel).
- Nausea and vomiting (Vitamin B6 100mg tablets, emetrol if you are not diabetic, Emetrex, sea bands).
- Rashes (hydrocortisone cream or ointment, caladryl lotion or cream, benadryl cream or capsules, oatmeal bath).
- Yeast infection of the vagina (Monistat® cream or tablets, Terazol® cream).

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

For more information regarding the medication you are taking and how it affects your pregnancy, go to

Physicians Drug Reference link: http://www.drugs.com/drug_information.html

**Some information based on studies from The Food and Drug Administration (FDA).*

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