

Safe Medications in Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

No drug can be considered 100% safe to use during pregnancy: all medications should be used with caution. Please check with your midwife or doctor if you are unsure about what you can take. The following list contains brand names to help you recognize which medications are safe; it does not indicate endorsement of these products. For more detailed information about medications in pregnancy, the following websites may be helpful:

www.mothersrisk.org

www.perinatology.com/exposures/druglist.html

Medication Safety by Class of Medication

Pain Killers

- Tylenol (Acetaminophen) is safe
- NSAIDS (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as Ibuprofen, Advil, Naprosyn) are only safe in first 6 months; **it is best to AVOID these drugs**
- Codeine is safe for **occasional** use
- Aspirin (ASA or acetylsalicylic acid) in low doses (60-100mg) appears safe, and may be indicated in some pregnancies; avoid regular use and doses over 150 mg

Cold and Flu Remedies

- There is no cure for colds and flu: we treat the symptoms
- For nasal congestion, try nasal drops or sprays, such as Salinex or Otrivin, for a few days
- For sore throat try warm salt water gargles or lozenges such as Halls
- Oral decongestants containing pseudoephedrine, such as Actifed, Contac C, Dristan, Sudafed, Tylenol and Vicks, are considered safe
- Cough suppressants and expectorants containing dextromethorphan and guaifenesin (eg. Benylin DM, Robitussin DM, Vicks Cough Syrup and Romilar) are considered safe for short term use; **AVOID cough syrups containing alcohol or iodine**
- Oral antihistamines that make you sleepy, such as Chlor-Trimeton, Benadryl, and Actifed are generally considered safe; **AVOID antihistamines that do NOT make you sleepy, such as Claritin and Allegra**

Allergy Remedies

- Nasal sprays are the safest to use in pregnancy (eg. cromolyn sodium or xylometazoline nasal spray)
- Oral antihistamines that make you sleepy, such as Chlor-Trimeton, Benadryl, and Actifed are generally considered safe; **AVOID antihistamines that do NOT make you sleepy, such as Claritin and Allegra**

Asthma Medications

- Most asthma medications are safe, including salbutamol, terbutaline, and beclomethasone; using inhalers is safer than taking oral medications

Itchy skin and/or Rashes

- Oatmeal bath (Aveeno)
- Caladryl or benadryl cream or lotion
- Hydrocortisone cream or ointment

Heartburn Medications

- Use products that say “sodium free” or “no sodium”
- Chewable Tums or Rolaids are safe, and contain calcium, which is good for you
- For more serious cases of heartburn, you may need to use Diovol, Maalox or Milk of Magnesia; if you are having problems with reflux, try Gaviscon

Vaginal Creams and Ovules

- Most antifungals (Canestan, Monistat, Micatin, Nystatin) are safe

Hemorrhoidal Preparations

- Safe topical preparations: Witch Hazel and Tucks
- Safe creams/ointments: Zinc oxide ointments (penaten, zincofax), Preparation H, Anusol

Constipation Remedies

- Bulk-forming agents such as Metamucil, Citrucil and Fiberall/Fibercon are safe
- Stool softeners such as Colace, Docusate, Senekot or Surfak are safe to use
- Do not use stimulant laxatives

Diarrhea Medications

- Do not use in first trimester (before 12 weeks)
- Do not use for longer than 24 hours
- Kaopectate, Immodium and Parepectolin are all safe when used as above

Antibiotics (for infections)

- Most antibiotics are safe; only take antibiotics that are prescribed by your midwife or doctor
- Tetracyclines and quinolones should be avoided in pregnancy and breastfeeding; metronidazole (flagyl) is contraindicated in the first trimester of pregnancy, but safe in the second and third trimester and for breastfeeding
- Recent studies show a possible link between antibiotic use in pregnancy and increased rates of asthma, hay fever and exzema in babies and children who were exposed; the effects did not appear to depend on the type of antibiotic used or the trimester in which it was taken Am J Respir Crit Care Med 2002; 166:827-832

First Aid Ointments

- J&J, Bacitracin and Neosporin are all safe

Commonly Used Products – What’s Safe in Pregnancy?

The following table contains some commonly used or asked about products. If you are uncertain about whether something you are doing or using in your home or at work is safe to do or use in pregnancy, ask your midwife.

Sugar Substitutes or Sweeteners

- Moderate amounts of aspartame (NutraSweet), saccharin (Sweet N Low), sodium cyclamate (Sugar Twin), and sucralose (Splenda) are safe

Hair Colours and Perms

- Occasional use is safe - in a well-ventilated area

Lice treatments

- Permethrin 1% rinse (Nix) and lindane 1% shampoo are considered safe

Household Cleaners

- Most products are safe; use in a well-ventilated area and protect yourself with gloves
- Avoid the use of industrial strength products

Paints

- Use latex (water-based) paints
- Use in a well-ventilated area
- If you feel sick while you are painting, leave the area immediately and go to a well-ventilated area

Insecticides

- Use mineral oil products such as Skin-so-Soft
- Do not use products containing more than 50% DEET, and **use any products containing DEET sparingly**

Pesticides

- **Avoid using all pesticides**
- If pesticides must be used in the home, stay out of the home 2-3 times longer than recommended
- Ventilate the area well after application of pesticides

VDT and Computer Terminals

- Generally considered safe at home or office
- Do not emit harmful radiation

X-Rays

- The amount of radiation from x-rays (especially dental) is generally very small
- Make sure your practitioner and x-ray technician know you are pregnant
- You should be given a lead apron to protect your belly

Air Travel during Pregnancy

Domestic air travel is usually permitted – and considered safe – until you are 36 weeks pregnant. International air travel is permitted until you are 32–35, weeks depending on the airline. Each airline has its own policies about pregnancy and flying; so check first. You may need to carry documentation stating your expected due date.

Flying poses no special risks to you or your baby, however, you should avoid flying if you have: severe anemia, sickle-cell disease or trait, or a history of thrombophlebitis. You should not fly at all if you have placental abnormalities or are at risk for premature labor. Ask your midwife if you are uncertain about whether it is safe for you to fly.

If you are flying, an aisle seat or a seat in the bulkhead will give the most space and comfort, but a seat over the wing in the midplane region will give the smoothest ride. Your safety belt should be fastened below your belly, just above your pubic bone.

Drink plenty of water and fluids while on board as the recirculated air on airplanes tends to be dehydrating. Try to walk every half hour if possible, and do ankle circles to encourage circulation in your legs and prevent blood clots from forming.

References

Drugs in Pregnancy and Breastfeeding. Ms. J. Busser & Ms. S. Ho, B.C. Womens Prescriber’s Handbook, Department of Pharmacy, B.C. Children’s and Women’s Health Centre of B.C. 2003
Managing Common Diseases and Medications During Pregnancy. Beth E. Cheney, RN, MSN, CFNP, Medscape 2002
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S.A 2004