

## Pregnancy and Medication

### Introduction:

Taking some medicines is sometimes necessary. However, when a pregnant woman experiences any health issues, she might find herself wondering whether or not the medicine she wishes to take is safe or not, especially when the health issue is temporary (e.g. headache, cold, influenza, etc.). When treatment is necessary, **here is what you need to take into consideration:**

- Always consult with your doctor before taking any medication. Some drugs may not be suitable for pregnancy or the dose may need to be adjusted.
- Inform your doctor during your first visit of any medication you take regularly and of any chronic conditions you may have so you can be prescribed drugs suitable for pregnant women.
- Make sure you inform any doctor, nurse or pharmacist you consult that you are pregnant before taking any measure or medicine.
- Use the minimum amount of off-the-counter drugs or supplements possible, including analgesics and antipyretics (e.g. Paracetamol) and avoid dental treatments, including local anesthetics and some vaccines (e.g. tetanus shots, flu shots) and nicotine replacement therapies.

### Effect of medication on the fetus:

Any medicine taken by the mother will reach the fetus through the placenta that also provides the baby with the food and oxygen needed for growth.

### Drugs taken without consulting a doctor may:

- Reach the fetus directly, causing problems with growth, physical and mental development, or even death
- Change the function of the placenta and can often narrow blood vessels, leading to a shortage in the supply of oxygen and nutrients to the fetus
- Cause contractions in the uterine muscles, putting pressure on the fetus or resulting in a preterm birth

### **Fear of taking medicines:**

It is not safe to stop taking any medication without consulting with a doctor on both the pregnancy and the treatment. Stopping any medication suddenly may result in harm for the mother and the fetus (e.g. stopping blood pressure medication without consulting with a doctor can leave to toxemia of pregnancy)

### **The effect of medication during the different stages of pregnancy:**

#### **- First trimester:**

During this period, the fetus and the organs are being formed. Cases of fetal anomalies often arise at this stage so it is preferable not to take any medicines other than those proven to be safe for pregnant women.

#### **- Second trimester:**

The fetus' organs are still developing at this stage but this period is considered less dangerous than the previous.

#### **- Third trimester:**

During this stage, most of the fetus' organs have formed except the brain and reproductive organs. Therefore, great care should be taken to avoid ingesting anything that might affect hormone levels. Avoid consuming anything that might cause cerebral problems (e.g. narcotics or psychiatric drugs).

### **What types of medicines are safe to use during pregnancy?**

#### **- Food supplements:**

Pregnant women often need food supplements to compensate for the deficiencies resulting from the lack of nutrient-rich food and to guarantee that the fetus can grow healthily. They are often prescribed by a doctor at the beginning of a pregnancy.

#### **- Medication for chronic illnesses:**

Chronic illnesses (e.g. asthma, diabetes, blood pressure) should be treated and controlled. A doctor can prescribe an appropriate treatment.

- **Analgesics:**

The use of painkillers (e.g. Paracetamol) in moderation is considered safe as long as a doctor has been consulted.

- **Anti-nausea/vomiting drugs:**

Vitamin B6 is considered a safe and effective way of treating nausea and vomiting during the first trimester.

- **Antibiotics:**

Some antibiotics from the Penicillin, Cephalosporin and Azithromycin families are considered safe during pregnancy.

**Immunization during pregnancy:**

During pregnancy, vaccines containing live viruses should be avoided (e.g. Rubella vaccine). However, seasonal vaccines and immunity-boosting vaccines (e.g. flu shots) are considered safe during pregnancy. Furthermore, pregnant women should receive a flu vaccine during their second and third trimesters to protect them from infections, especially during flu season. Tetanus shots are also important as they protect both mother and baby during childbirth. This vaccine reduces the risk of the infant developing Tetanus if infected by a microbe during childbirth between the 27th and 36th weeks of pregnancy.

**Bath salts:**

Some bath salts may contain many chemicals that could relax and decompress the muscles. This could lead to a miscarriage or a preterm birth. Some salts contain products that can narrow blood vessels, limiting the oxygen and food that reaches the fetus.

**Opioids (pain relievers and analgesics):**

Opioids are used during pregnancy to reduce pain (e.g. morphine). However, they also create a highly analgesic effect and their abuse could lead to addiction. These drugs can easily travel through the placenta to the fetus.

Withdrawal symptoms can be seen 7 hours to 7 days after childbirth for both mother and baby. While the use of prescribed opioids rarely leads to birth defects, their use during labor may affect the fetus and undermine the baby's ability to breathe after birth. However, if they are necessary during childbirth, minimal doses will be administered. The use of other illegal opioids (e.g. Heroin) increases the risk of complications during pregnancy (e.g. miscarriage, preterm birth, smaller or underdeveloped infants).

### **Alcohol and pregnancy:**

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy is the main cause of birth defects (e.g. malformation of facial features, small head, underdeveloped brain, mental disability, underdeveloped heart). If no birth defects are visible, behavioral issues may arise (e.g. aggressive behavior, ADHD). Alcohol further increases the risk of miscarriage and the newborn is often severely underweight. There is also a risk of death among infants in this case shortly after birth.

**Example of medicines that can be used for simple ailments during pregnancy:**

Simple ailment	First choice	Second choice	Avoid using
Constipation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eat more foods rich in fiber: green vegetables, ispaghul</li> <li>- Drink lots of fluids</li> </ul>	Following the doctor's guidelines	-
Coughing	Drink hot water mixed with honey and lemon	-	Medicines containing Codeine unless prescribed by a doctor
Diarrhea	Consume oral hydrating fluids	-	-
Hemorrhoids	Creams or calming suppositories	Cold compresses	-
Allergies (Hay, dust, animal, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Antihistamines through eye drops, nasal sprays,</li> <li>- steroid nasal sprays</li> </ul>	Doses of Loratadine or Chlorohistol according to the doctor's prescription	Other types of histamine

Simple ailment	First choice	Second choice	Avoid using
Lice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Combing or brushing hair while wet.</li> <li>- Dimethicone lotion</li> </ul>	Lice treatments containing Malathion diluted in water	-
Indigestion	Antacids	Drugs that decrease acid production in the stomach: Omeprazole based on the doctor's instructions	
Nose congestion (blockage or discharge)	Indirectly inhaling steam from hot water	For severe cases, Oxymetazoline or the nasal spray Xylometazoline	Phenylephrine, Pseudoephedrine may be used, especially in the first trimester
Sudden pain (headache, toothache, etc.)	Paracetamol	Ibuprofen may be taken in the second trimester only unless the doctor advises otherwise	Medicines containing Codeine unless advised by a doctor
Vaginal inflammation or rash	A treatment must be prescribed by a doctor	Clotrimazole cream based on the doctor's instructions. No internal tool may be used, especially in the third trimester	Fluconazole

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