



Taking Medicine Safely

All of us will take medication at some time in our lives. It is important to discuss with your health care provider how your medication could affect your plans for (or not) getting pregnant. Some of the medicine choices you and your health care provider make while you are not pregnant may differ from the choices you make when you are pregnant.

Although medications are tested for safety, **some medications may not be safe to take in pregnancy.** If you think you could be pregnant or are not taking steps to avoid pregnancy, **do not begin any medicines before talking with your health care provider.**

Prescription medicines

If you are already taking a medicine prescribed by your health care provider, and are pregnant or thinking about getting pregnant, **do not stop taking the medicine without first talking to your health care provider.**

- In some instances, it may be more harmful to stop taking the medicine than to continue taking it.
- It may be necessary to reduce the amount of medicine you are taking or substitute the medicine for something safer in pregnancy.

Over-The-Counter (OTC) medicines

All OTC medicines have a Drug Facts label. The Drug Facts label is arranged the same way on all OTC medicines to make information about using the medicine easier to find. One section of the Drug Facts label is for pregnant women. With OTC medicines, the label usually tells a pregnant woman to speak with her health care provider before using the medicine. **Some OTC medicines are known to cause problems in pregnancy.** The labels for these medicines give pregnant women facts about why and when they should avoid the medicine.

Here are some examples:

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), like ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®), naproxen (Aleve®), and aspirin (acetylsalicylate) can cause serious blood flow problems in the baby if used after 28 weeks of pregnancy. Also, aspirin may increase the chance for bleeding problems in the mother and the baby during pregnancy or at delivery.
- Seizure medications, Accutane®, or high doses of vitamin A can increase the chance of birth defects.
- The labels for nicotine therapy drugs, like the nicotine patch and lozenge, remind women that smoking can harm an unborn child. While the medicine is thought to be safer than smoking, the risks of the medicine are not fully known. Pregnant smokers are advised to try quitting without the medicine first.

Other things like caffeine and herbal medicines can also affect the growing baby. Talk with your health care provider about caffeine and the use of herbal products.

MEDICATION SAFETY - continued

Vitamins

Regular multivitamins and prenatal vitamins are safe to take during pregnancy. **All Women should take a daily multivitamin or prenatal vitamin that contains at least 400 micrograms of folic acid.** Folic acid can help reduce the chance of a baby having a birth defect in the brain or spine.

- Start taking these vitamins before you become pregnant.
- **Once pregnant, you should switch to a prenatal vitamin with 600 micrograms of folic acid.**
- Just as taking the correct amount of vitamins can help your baby, **too many vitamins can harm your baby. Look for vitamins that have no more than 8,000 International Units of Vitamin A in a daily dose.**

Keep in Mind

- If you are planning to get pregnant, are already pregnant, or not taking steps to avoid pregnancy, do not take any prescription or OTC medication without discussing it with your health care provider.
- To check the safety of medications go to: www.medlineplus.gov.

Provider Instructions

My Next Steps

I will contact my health care provider and find out how the medications I am taking may affect my pregnancy if I should get pregnant.

I will talk to my health care provider before I start taking any new medications, including OTC medications, to make sure that the medication is helpful to me and not harmful to my pregnancy or future pregnancy.

I will take a multivitamin with 400 micrograms of folic acid everyday to help me stay healthy and lower my risk of having a baby born with a serious brain or spinal cord defect.

I will never take prescription medication not prescribed specifically for me, or prescribed for someone else.

References:

Content adapted from the Office on Women's Health in the Department of Health and Human Services <http://www.4woman.gov/faq/pregmed.htm>.

