



## Buying and Safely Using Over-the-Counter Medicines

### During Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

Medicines that you don't need a prescription to buy are called over-the-counter medicines. You can buy them in pharmacies as well as groceries, gas stations, and convenience stores. They are considered safe for ordinary people to use as long as they read all of the information and warnings in the package. Since you know your body and your medical history, read all of the information and decide if this medicine is right for you. Reading the back of each medicine box should become a lifelong habit for you and your family's good health.

All over-the-counter medicines urge you to ask your doctor before taking any medicine when you are pregnant and breastfeeding. Your midwife has tried to give you very accurate advice about some of the common medicines women might use during pregnancy. However, pay attention to any new information about medicines because recommendations can change. It's never a bad idea to check in with your midwife if you feel you need to take a medicine.

Looking for a medicine in a pharmacy can be confusing. Every medicine has a generic name; some examples are ibuprofen and acetaminophen. But some manufacturers are allowed to give their own name to a generic medicine; this is called a trade name. So ibuprofen can be sold as Advil or Motrin! Acetaminophen can be sold as Tylenol! It can be very confusing. So, here's another lifelong habit; turn the box over and look for the table that says: "Active Ingredients." This will give you the generic name of what's in the box, and that is something that never changes. A trade name can be used for different medicines so Robitussin DM are the generic drugs dextromethorphan plus guaifenesin but Robitussin CF has dextromethorphan, guaifenesin, and phenylephrine. Read the back to know what you're buying. Also, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration insists that a generic medicine is just as effective as a trade name medicine so buy generics whenever you can; you'll save a lot of money.

During pregnancy and breastfeeding, you should avoid taking all drugs and medications, unless a midwife or physician tells you the medicine is safe to take. Most of the following over-the-counter medicines are fairly safe

in pregnancy and breastfeeding, but you should decide for yourself how urgent or complicated your problem is; you may decide you don't need any drugs. Do not take any drug not on this list unless you review it with your midwife or doctor (primary care provider).

Anyone, at any time, can have a reaction to a medication, food, or substance; this can range from mild to serious. Allergic reactions include skin problems like rashes, swelling, and hives (itchy bumps), stomach and bowel problems like nausea, vomiting, bloody diarrhea, and stomach pain, lung problems like noisy breathing, coughing, and difficulty breathing, and heart problems like lightheadedness, sweating, confusion or anxiety, and heart palpitations (pounding, fast heart beat). If any of these happen to you, please call your primary care provider's office if it seems like a mild problem, or call 9-1-1 if it is serious. However, know that these reactions are usually very rare. Just be prepared if it happens to you or someone you know.

### Fever, Pain, and Headache in Pregnancy

In pregnancy, some women get a fever, pain, or headaches. It is important to know that aspirin should never be taken during pregnancy or breastfeeding unless under the direct supervision of a physician or nurse-midwife; one important use of aspirin during pregnancy is to prevent pre-eclampsia. Again, only do this with clear instructions from an obstetrician or CNM.

Tylenol is a pain reliever and fever reducer sold in pharmacies, convenience stores, and gas stations. Tylenol is the trade name and acetaminophen is the generic name; they both work the same. At this time, it is considered to be safe throughout your entire pregnancy and breastfeeding, as long as you do not take too much. However, be aware that some studies in 2013 showed a possible link to autism and exposure of the fetus in the womb to acetaminophen (Tylenol). This is not definite yet, so use it only when you need to. Do not take this every day. Look closely at the bottles of medication in the store. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) can come in either 325 or 500 mg pills. You can take either 500 - 650 mg every 4 hours or 1,000 mg every 6 hours; this will give you 4,000 mg per day if you took this steadily. This is the maximum dose you should ever take of this medicine! So, it is better to take less than the maximum. Try taking 500 mg every 4 to 6 hours, only as long as you need it. In the 500 mg pill, the cost ranges from \$5.00 for 100 generic pills to \$9.00 for 100 trade name pills. Some people, when they take this medicine, have nausea or heartburn; usually, these problems can be avoided if you eat a little food with the medicine so you don't have an empty stomach. However, if you have extreme tiredness, very dark urine, or yellow eyes or skin after taking acetaminophen, call your primary care provider right away.

Another pain reliever is ibuprofen. This is the generic name and it has two trade names, Motrin and Advil. In the first trimester of pregnancy, this is a Category B medicine so it is fairly safe to use. However, it should not be taken after 20 weeks in pregnancy because it can cause serious problems with the blood circulation in your fetus. This medicine is very safe for breastfeeding; there is no ibuprofen found in the nursing infant's bloodstream. Ibuprofen's side effects usually happen to the elderly; however, some young people rarely have stomach pain, constipation or diarrhea, heartburn, gas, and nausea. Be sure to eat some food with this medicine to prevent some of these problems. Call your primary care physician right away if you feel dizzy, have bloody or black stools, or sensitivity to light. Do not take ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) constantly in pregnancy as the problems are more likely to happen to you; only take it when you need it. Each pill is 200 mg. One dose can be 200 to 600 mg, taken every six hours. Start with the lowest dose, and add one pill after one hour, if you are not better. Wait another hour; if there is still no pain relief, take another pill. This way, you will use as little ibuprofen as you need for relief. The cost for this medicine ranges from \$3.00 for 100 pills of generic ibuprofen to \$6.00 for 100 pills of trade name Motrin.

## Heartburn

Heartburn is common in pregnancy due to the hormones of pregnancy that relax the sphincter at the top of the stomach. This lets stomach acid to get up into your esophagus, causing pain. Also, as the baby grows, it puts more pressure on the stomach and leaves less space, allowing more acid to escape more easily and frequently, even with smaller meals. The increase of saliva in pregnancy doesn't help either. Some non-pharmaceutical methods for relieving heartburn include remaining upright after meals, avoiding drinking with meals, eating smaller more frequent meals, papaya enzyme, and apple cider vinegar. Also, try eating cashews or drinking mineral water to soothe heartburn and cut down on spicy foods and big meals.

If these do not provide relief, antacids such as Tums (calcium carbonate) or Mylanta (magnesium and aluminum) may bring relief. Antacids bind up stomach acid but they do not prevent stomach acid production in your body. You can take 1 or 2 tablets of Tums every 2 hours, if you need it, but don't take more than 7,000 mg per day. These tablets come in 500, 750, or 1,000 mg tablets so pay attention to the dosage you buy. You can take them after meals or before bed, if you are having heartburn. Possible side effects for Tums include constipation, vomiting, dry mouth, and frequent urination. If you take too much, the high levels of calcium will cause lots of problems to your muscles like twitching. If you reach the maximum amount of Tums per day, please talk to your midwife or primary care provider first; you might need to advance to a medication for gastro-esophageal disease (GERD).

Mylanta works similar to Tums; however, this liquid acts faster than the Tums pills. Take 2-4 teaspoons after a meal or before bedtime but do not take more than 24 teaspoons per day. Also, do not take 24 teaspoons a day for 2 weeks; if you need that much Mylanta, you may have GERD so talk to your midwife or your primary care provider. Mylanta gives some women either diarrhea or constipation. If you take too much for too long a time, it can make your bones soft or brittle. This medicine and Tums are for mild heartburn, not GERD.

Please do not take any antacid within 2 hours of taking any kind of iron supplement; it will keep the iron from working. Also, once your baby is born, most women do not have problems with heartburn. However, for the occasional flare-up, both Tums and Mylanta are considered safe in breastfeeding.

### Gastro-esophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) in Pregnancy

In pregnancy, many woman experience heartburn that can progress to a worse form called gastro-esophageal reflux disease or GERD. This can cause bleeding in your esophagus and become quite serious. If your midwife or primary care physician recommends you need this medicine, a safe one for pregnancy is Zantac. That is the trade name; the generic name of this medicine is ranitidine. Look on the back of the box to see ranitidine as the active ingredient. Ranitidine (Zantac) is considered a class B drug by FDA which means animal studies have failed to show that it can cause harm but does not have enough studies on humans. It is known to cross placenta so should only be used when the benefits outweigh the risks. Ranitidine (Zantac) passes into breast milk; the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a related drug called cimetidine (Tagamet) to be more compatible with breastfeeding. Experts consider ranitidine (Zantac) safe for breastfeeding. Ranitidine (Zantac) comes in 150 mg tablets and you should take it twice a day. If you buy ranitidine (Zantac), it will cost \$15 for 65 ranitidine (Zantac) pills, or about \$5 for 25 generic ranitidine (Zantac) pills so shop around. Be sure to follow the instructions on the box and you should feel much better in 24 hours. Possible side effects for adults include headaches, dizziness, insomnia, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and constipation. If you have any problems with your kidneys or liver, you should not take this medicine in pregnancy. . Please do not take any GERD medicine within 2 hours of taking any kind of iron supplement; it will keep the iron from working.

If your heartburn gets worse, be sure to talk about this with your midwife or primary care provider. She may recommend you try a more powerful medicine to reduce your stomach acid. Pantoprazole is a more powerful medication used to decrease the amount of acid produced in the stomach, it is not a medication used to immediately treat the symptoms of heartburn like ranitidine (Zantac). The trade name of pantoprazole is Protonix and can be purchased in any pharmacy. Pantoprazole (Protonix) is available over the counter at any pharmacy and costs on average \$16.00 for 30 tablets and as you increase in quantity the price goes down. Pantoprazole is considered a class B drug by FDA which means animal studies have failed to show that it can cause harm but it does not have enough studies in pregnancy. According to breastfeeding experts, it is considered safe for breastfeeding since it is destroyed in the baby's stomach. Side effects for adults include headaches, dizziness, dry mouth, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, gas, rashes, and problems with your liver or kidney. Be sure to follow directions for safe use. Please do not take any GERD medicine within 2 hours of taking any kind of iron supplement; it will keep the iron from working.

### Iron-Deficiency Anemia

During pregnancy, your body makes a lot more red blood cells to nourish your growing baby. Since each new red blood cell needs iron to work properly, your body needs a lot of iron before and during pregnancy. Some women start pregnancy with very little iron stored up so they can't make enough red cells. Your midwife has talked to you about diet and herbal therapies for increasing the iron in your body; if these don't work, you can add iron by taking some kind of ferrous supplement every day.

Ferrous sulfate is the kind of iron that works well, and it is safe for your growing baby during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Take one pill of 325 mg of ferrous sulfate every day; this will give you 30 mg of actual iron. Look on the back of the box under Active Ingredients to be sure this is the dose of iron you are getting. Be sure to take your iron pill on an empty stomach, at least 1 hour before or 2 hours after a meal so it can be absorbed. Also, when you have your pill, take a source of Vitamin C source like a glass of fresh orange juice or your prenatal vitamin pill. Make sure you do not take any kind of antacid for heartburn or an antibiotic for infection 2 hours before or after taking your iron pill because these will prevent the iron from working. Some women experience constipation, nausea, or diarrhea when taking this medicine; if this happens to you, talk to your midwife about different kinds of iron but do not take a different medication to stop the new problem. Generic ferrous sulfate costs \$4 – 8.00 for 100 pills.

### Diarrhea

Anytime someone has liquid stools, this is called diarrhea. Most of the time, diarrhea is caused by getting some kind of infection in your gut, and your body is doing the right thing by getting rid of the infection in your stool quickly. However, it is important to drink lots of clear fluids; drinks like Gatorade with electrolytes are good to replace what you are losing in the diarrhea. If you get dehydrated in pregnancy, it can cause preterm labor so focus on fluid replacement, starting very slowly with sips. Fluids and time is the best cure for diarrhea. Call your primary care provider or your midwife if you are having diarrhea for more than 48 hours, if you vomit up all fluids more than 12 hours, or you think you might be having preterm labor. Meanwhile, make it a habit for you and all of your family members to be sure to wash hands thoroughly before meals and after using the bathroom in order to avoid infections.

Only very rarely will you be told to take a drug to stop the diarrhea since this is the wisdom of the body to get rid of toxins. If you are told you need one, the best one in pregnancy and breastfeeding is loperamide; this is the generic name for Imodium (trade name). Loperamide costs \$7-10.00 for 30 capsules. You should take 4 mg (2 capsules) for the first dose, then take 2 mg (1 capsule) after each loose stool. However, do not take more than

16 mg total (8 capsules) in 24 hours; you should start feeling a little better in 1 to 5 hours though it may take up to 48 hours. Do not take this if you have a fever, bloody or black stools, or with beer, wine, or alcohol. You may experience a dry mouth, drowsiness, constipation, gas pains in your abdomen, and abdominal pain. Call your primary care provider or go to an emergency department right away if you are having sudden, extreme pain in your abdomen; this is a rare problem. When your stools become more firm, reduce the medication and try to eat high fiber foods like oatmeal and whole grains. Keep up your fluid intake, and let your midwife know how you're doing.

### Constipation

Constipation does not mean few stools but stools that are hard and/or dry. Usually, eating a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables as well as whole-grain foods with plenty of water prevents this problem. However, the hormones of pregnancy cause the bowels to slow down so you can absorb lots of nutrients for your baby; this dries out the stool so lots of pregnant women have constipation problems. Always try to improve your eating first do talk to your midwife about your concern.

If you are still bothered with dry, hard stools, try taking a stool softener. This kind of medicine doesn't force your bowels to move along, it just helps to get water into the stool so your stool is soft; it is very important to take the medicine with lots of water. A common drug is docusate; this is the generic name and Colace is the trade name. You can take a 100 mg pill once a day; if this isn't enough, take one pill twice a day, about 12 hours apart. This will take up 1 to 3 days to work. Docusate is considered safe in pregnancy and breastfeeding, though there are not high-quality studies on it. The generic pills cost \$4.00 for 100 while the Colace trade name costs \$10.00 for 100. Side effects of docusate (Colace) may be stomach pain, diarrhea, or cramping as your body gets used to the effects; these should pass in 1 to 3 days, however. There are few problems with this medicine.

If you continue to struggle with constipation, you might then try high-fiber psyllium seed powder; one trade name for this is Metamucil. This is a powder you add to water and drink to increase the bulk and wetness of your stools. Metamucil offers gluten-free and sugar-free versions as well. The trade name Metamucil costs \$15 for a 72 dose container while the generic version costs \$12.00. There are few side effects, if used according to directions. For women who do not regularly get fiber in their diet, psyllium (Metamucil) can cause gas and stomach cramping at first because the bowels need to get used to handling the fiber. These problems should go away in 1 to 4 days. Do not take psyllium for 2 hours before or after another medicine because it can reduce the absorption. Psyllium (Metamucil) is not meant for use every day because the bowels will become dependent on it to work properly; use this medicine on an occasional basis for up to a week. It may take up to 24 hours to work. Stop taking this medicine when your stools are a normal quality and then focus on eating lots of high-fiber foods.

### Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are varicose veins of the rectum; a varicose vein is any vein that is swollen with from excess pressure. This can cause pain, burning, or itching in or on your rectum. Women who are pregnant are more likely to get varicose veins because the weight of the fetus in the pelvis can prevent good blood flow from the legs to the heart. Ways to avoid or treat hemorrhoids include avoiding standing and sitting too long; walking frequently moves the blood around your body. Avoid constipation by having lots for water and high-fiber foods. Your midwife will have other suggestions to treat hemorrhoids, too, so be sure to talk to her.

If you are still bothered by hemorrhoids, you can then use an ointment to shrink them down. Preparation H is the trade name for phenylephrine (generic name); this works by shrinking the expanded veins. Preparation H comes as a cream for external hemorrhoids or as a suppository for internal hemorrhoids. When using, clean the

affected area by patting or blotting with a cleansing wipe, then gentle dry with a tissue. Apply the cream externally or in the lower portion of the anal canal only. For application in the lower anal canal, attach the dispensing cap and lubricate it, then gently insert the cap partway and insert the medicine. Clean the dispensing cap thoroughly after each use. You should stop using Preparation H if bleeding occurs from your rectum, the hemorrhoids worsen, do not improve in 7 days, or if symptoms increase. The tube it costs \$14.99 or you can get the store brand for \$10.99, which will be just as effective. Preparation H is safe for both pregnancy and breastfeeding.

### Seasonal Allergies and Nasal Congestion

During pregnancy, some women experience a constantly running nose because of the hormones that loosen up the body to get ready for labor. Sometimes, a cold produces a very runny nose so stay home, get lots of rest and hot fluids; tincture of time is a great healer! However, if you feel you must dry up your nose for a short period of time, talk to your midwife first. One kind of medicine is phenylephrine (generic name) or Neo-Synephrine (trade name) that you squeeze two or three sprays into your nose every four hours, if you need it; the strength of the medicine is 0.25 – 1 %. This medicine should not be taken during the first thirteen weeks of your pregnancy as there is a small chance that it can cause birth defects; the chance is higher if you smoke. In the second and third trimesters of pregnancy, you can take it once or twice a day for only one or two days; any longer than that can cause the placenta to function poorly. You may experience stinging and burning in your nose after taking this medicine. Occasional use of this medicine is considered safe in breastfeeding.

Many women have seasonal allergies in the spring or fall that can cause sneezing, itching eyes, and a runny nose. Your midwife will work with you on alternative therapies to treat these problems. Fortunately, one medicine can often reduce most of the symptoms of seasonal allergies. Loratidine is the generic name for a common medicine that is safe during pregnancy and breastfeeding; the trade names are Claritin and Alavert; look on the back of the box to make sure you have the right medicine. Take only 1 tablet per day. Some women find that loratidine causes headaches, drowsiness, fatigue, insomnia, nervousness, or dry mouth; there are no serious side effects. Avoid taking it with kava-kava, valerian, or chamomile. Claritin can be bought at any drug, grocery, and convenience store. It costs around \$11.00 but the generic version, which works the same, will cost around \$9.00. Most drug stores have their own brand of this drug and will always cost less with the same results. Claritin taking in the recommended dose is safe in pregnancy and breastfeeding.

### Coughs

When you have an infection in your lungs or throat, you cough to remove the pus that is building up; by removing it, it helps the body focus on healing the infection. Inhaling steam vapors of eucalyptus, peppermint or ginger into the lungs or adding a few drops of these essential oils to the vaporizer during periods of rest are some alternatives that users may find helpful. If you have very thick mucus that is difficult to remove with coughing, you can take a medicine to thin the mucus which makes it easier for the body to remove; this is called an expectorant. An expectorant does not make you stop coughing but it does make the coughing easier.

Guaifenesin is the generic name of an effective expectorant; there are many trade names for this, including Mucinex, Robitussin, and Vicks Dayquil Mucus Control. Look on the back of the box under Active Ingredients to be sure you are buying the right medicine. It comes in different forms including tablets, capsules, and liquid; avoid any that have alcohol. Some pills are extended release so they last a long time. Since there are a lot of forms of guaifenesin, there is a wide span of prices. Depending on what kind of medicine you buy, the prices vary, depending on what other benefits they offer. Mucinex brand of guaifenesin generally costs \$.40 - \$.80 per pill and is sold in boxes of anywhere from 14 to 100 tablets. Expect to pay approximately \$14.00 for a 6 ounce bottle of the liquid; multi-symptom preparations cost a bit more. Pay attention to how much you take and how often;

200-400 mg taken every 4 hours is typical. Do not take more than 2,400 mg a day total. Some women experience diarrhea, headache, or a rash when they take this medicine. There are no well-studied medicines for coughing in pregnancy and breastfeeding. Avoid taking any medicine unless there is a strong need to help your body remove the mucous from your lungs and throat. Talk to your midwife or primary care provider about this before you take guaifenesin.

If you need to stop the coughing reflex, that type of drug is called an anti-tussive. A common generic drug for this is dextromethorphan; lots of trade names exist for this, including Delsym DM and Sucrets DM. Remember, the coughing reflex is healthy for your body. Only use this medicine occasionally for an urgent need like sleeping. Remember, too, that there are no medicines well-studied for coughing during pregnancy so we cannot assume there is no harm to your baby. There are liquid, pill, and capsule forms of this medicine; typically, you take 10 to 20 mg of the drug every four hours, if you need it; do not take more than 120 mg per day. An average cost is \$6.70 - \$10.00, depending on the size of bottle and pill, capsule, or liquid. The medication can be more effective if used with chest percussion and vibration; talk to your midwife about this. You should start to cough less in 30 minutes, and it will last 3 to 6 hours. If your cough lasts longer than a week or if you have a high fever, rash, or bad headache, see your primary care provider. This drug only rarely causes nausea; it does not have serious side effects. Because of the nature of this medicine, it cannot pass through breast milk so it is considered to be very safe during breastfeeding.

### Vaginal Yeast Infections

During pregnancy, your hormones shift to feed your growing fetus, and to prepare your breasts for breastfeeding. Sometimes, these hormones increase the amount of sugar in your vagina; this feeds the naturally-occurring yeast in your vagina to grow too much, causing a yeast infection. Talk to your midwife about trying alternative therapies first. If you and your midwife agree, you can use a medicine from the pharmacy to treat this. Clotrimazole is the generic name of a common drug to attack the cells walls of just yeast cells; this doesn't harm other organisms in your vagina. Clotrimazole 1% is not absorbed into the body and so it is considered to be very safe during pregnancy; also, it does not pass into breast milk so it is safe during breastfeeding. The trade names for this are Gyne-Lotrimin or Mycelex G; the generic cream is \$5.00 for 1.5 ounces while the trade name is \$10.00. The medication comes with an applicator so you fill it to the line, and push the cream high into your vagina. Yeast infections during pregnancy are difficult to cure because of the hormones so be sure to use this medicine every night for 7 nights, without stopping, even if you feel better. Some women feel burning, itching, redness or stinging when the cream goes on to the irritated areas but this should go away as the healing occurs.

### Insect Repellent to Prevent Insect Bites and Infections

The immune systems of pregnant women are changed during pregnancy so that the pregnant woman does not attack her growing fetus. For some infections, pregnant women become sicker and have more lifelong problems than non-pregnant women; this is true for both Lyme's Disease and West Nile Virus which are now spreading throughout the US. It is recommended that pregnant women protect themselves when outdoors in warm weather by using an effective insect repellent.

Diethyl-meta-toluamide, frequently shortened to DEET, is the active ingredient in many insect repellents. DEET does not kill insects (mosquitoes, black flies, fleas, ticks) but it prevents them from smelling humans as food. DEET is applied directly to the skin either as a spray or a wipe. The FDA recommends using DEET but only sparingly; use just enough to cover exposed skin. Do not use under clothing, and wash it off when returning indoors. Do not apply it on cuts, wounds, or irritated skin. 50% strength is the maximum needed to work, do not buy it stronger than this. In fact, 30% DEET lasts for 6 hours (unless swimming or sweating) so this is a good

concentration to use. The American Academy of Pediatricians recommends using 10 – 30% DEET for children older than 2 months. Is it safe? With all those big words and initials in the name, it can't be. Right? Wrong!!! This repellent has been used world-wide for over 50 years. Billions of people have used it and there are many, many studies covering many years. This is a very safe medication, especially when the above instructions are followed. There are very rare reports of seizures by people who have inhaled lots of DEET; avoid breathing the fumes. This is very safe in pregnancy and breastfeeding. Don't allow children to apply DEET themselves, though, and avoid putting DEET on children's hands as they put their hands in their mouths. DEET is safer than infections spread by insects.

### Sunblock to Prevent Sunburn

Sunburns may lead to skin cancer so avoiding them is important. There are two types of medicines to prevent sunburn: sunscreen chemically changes the skin so it cannot accept ultraviolet light while a sunblock physically blocks the ultraviolet light from getting to the skin and is considered to be a broader spectrum. A sunscreen is colorless and a sunblock is visible and is more difficult to wash off. Since very little sunblock is absorbed into the skin, it is felt to be safer than sunscreen during pregnancy and for young children.

Zinc oxide occurs naturally and it is used in many sunblock products. It has the broadest spectrum UVA and UVB reflector that is approved for use as a sunblock by the FDA, and is non-irritating and non-allergenic. Zinc oxide is considered safe for all ages above 6 months. It should be applied to exposed skin as needed; follow the directions for application, and re-apply after sweating or swimming. The cost of sunblock containing zinc oxide will vary depending on the size of the container, though generally it costs anywhere from \$1-\$3 an oz. Note that SPF numbers rate how good a product is at preventing sunburn; experts agree that SPF 30 is the maximum number needed so don't pay more for higher SPF's. Is it safe? Most skin experts recommend using zinc oxide (or titanium oxide) sunblock rather than sunscreens during pregnancy; these are considered more safe than getting too much sun exposure. Zinc oxide does not pass into the breast milk so it is safe for nursing.