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Acetaminophen and Pregnancy

This sheet talks about the risks that exposure to acetaminophen can have during pregnancy. With each pregnancy, all women have a 3% to 5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your health care provider.

What is acetaminophen?

Acetaminophen, commonly known as Tylenol[®], is a medication used to treat fever and mild to moderate pain. Acetaminophen is available alone and in combination with other medications to treat symptoms of colds, flu, headache and osteoarthritis. You can buy acetaminophen in different forms, including liquids, tablets, capsules, and suppositories.

Can taking acetaminophen during pregnancy cause miscarriage or birth defects?

No, taking acetaminophen at the recommended doses has not been shown to increase the risk for pregnancy loss or birth defects. Some studies have suggested that taking acetaminophen daily or most days during the second half of pregnancy could slightly increase the risk of wheezing or asthma in children. However, the illness the mother may have or other reasons why the mother needs to use the acetaminophen may be related to the development of asthma in the child, rather than a direct effect of the acetaminophen treatment itself. At this time, it is not known whether using acetaminophen regularly during pregnancy is associated with a small increased risk of asthma or wheezing in children. Overall, acetaminophen is considered by most doctors to be the pain reliever of choice during pregnancy.

Can taking acetaminophen while I am pregnant have an effect on my baby's developing brain?

Not that we are aware of. A well-done study followed children whose mothers took acetaminophen during their pregnancy. At four years of age, no harmful effects on these children's I.Q. or development were seen.

How much acetaminophen is safe to take while I am pregnant?

It is always best to use as little medication as needed for as short a time as you can. You should ask your doctor how much acetaminophen you should be taking. It is important that you do not take more than the maximum recommended dose of 4 grams (4000mg) in one day. Since acetaminophen is also in many combination medications, you should be careful to check the ingredients of any medications that you take. You will need to add up the amount of acetaminophen in the medications to make sure you are not taking more than you should.

What are the dangers of taking too much acetaminophen?

Taking too much acetaminophen may cause liver damage, kidney damage, and anemia in you. It has also been seen to cause the same problems in the baby. Therefore, it is

important that you not take more than the recommended amount.

Is there anyone who should avoid taking acetaminophen?

Women who have had a liver injury should talk to their doctors before taking acetaminophen or other pain medication.

Is it safe for the father of the baby to take acetaminophen?

There is no evidence to suggest that a man's taking acetaminophen would affect his ability to conceive or increase risk to a pregnancy. In general, medications that the father takes do not increase risk to a pregnancy because the father does not share a blood connection with the developing baby. For more information, please see the OTIS fact sheet *Paternal Exposures and Pregnancy*.

Is it safe for me to take acetaminophen while I am breastfeeding?

The amount of acetaminophen that enters the breast milk is very small and less than the dose usually given to infants. The WHO Working Group on Drugs and Human Lactation, as well as the American Academy of Pediatrics, consider acetaminophen safe to take while breastfeeding.

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If you have questions about the information on this fact sheet or other exposures during pregnancy, call OTIS at 1-866-626-6847.