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Prednisone/Prednisolone and Pregnancy

This sheet talks about the risks that exposure to prednisone/prednisolone 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 are prednisone and prednisolone?

Prednisone and prednisolone are corticosteroid medications that are taken by mouth. In the body prednisone is broken down into prednisolone. Prednisone and prednisolone are commonly used to treat many conditions including asthma, autoimmune diseases and skin conditions. They can help to prevent or suppress inflammation and immune responses. Prednisone and prednisolone are prescribed in a wide range of doses, depending on what condition is being treated.

I am taking prednisone/prednisolone during the first trimester of my pregnancy. Is there a risk for birth defects?

There have been some studies that have suggested a small increased risk of oral clefts when oral corticosteroids like prednisone or prednisolone are used in the first trimester. An oral cleft occurs when the lip or palate (roof of the mouth) does not fully close during development. In the general population, the risk for having a baby with an oral cleft is about 1 in 1,000. These studies suggest that if a woman takes an oral corticosteroid in her first trimester, her risk of having a baby with an oral cleft is between 3 and 6 in 1,000. In contrast, a number of other human studies have not shown an increase in the risk for birth defects with first trimester exposure to oral corticosteroids. If there is a risk from first trimester exposure to prednisone/prednisolone, it is felt to be very small.

As with any medication, it is recommended that you speak with your health care provider before you stop or change your medication. The benefits of taking prednisone or prednisolone and treating your condition should be weighed against the small potential risk.

I have to take prednisone/prednisolone everyday during my pregnancy. Will this cause any other harmful effects?

Possibly. Taking an oral corticosteroid like prednisone or prednisolone chronically during pregnancy has been associated with an increased risk for delivering a baby that is premature (born before 37 weeks gestation) and/or has a lower birth weight than expected.

Separating the effect of the maternal disease in pregnancy and the effect of the use of oral corticosteroids in pregnancy is difficult. Some studies have suggested that the pregnant mother's underlying disease, such as rheumatoid arthritis or asthma, may be the cause of the baby being smaller or premature. However, other studies have found that the use of oral corticosteroids in pregnancy increases the risk for a smaller or premature baby, independent of the mother's disease or its severity.

Many women need to continue taking prednisone or prednisolone in pregnancy to control their disease. It is recommended that you speak with your health care provider about your treatment plan in pregnancy.

Can I take prednisone/prednisolone while breastfeeding?

Yes. Small amounts of prednisone and prednisolone enter breast milk. Prednisone is very similar to the body's naturally occurring hormones, which are necessary for milk production and the health of infants. Since people produce these hormones naturally, it is not expected that the amount of prednisone or prednisolone in the breast milk would cause harmful effects in the nursing infant or the mother's milk production.

The amount of prednisone or prednisolone in breast milk is highest approximately one hour after taking the medicine. To limit the amount in the breast milk, you can wait four hours after taking prednisone or prednisolone before breastfeeding your baby. Keeping your dose as low as possible will also help to limit the amount of medicine in your breast milk.

The American Academy of Pediatrics classifies prednisone and prednisolone as usually compatible with breastfeeding.

The father of my baby was taking prednisone/prednisolone when I got pregnant. Will this affect my baby?

There is no evidence to suggest that a father's use of prednisone or prednisolone causes infertility or birth defects. 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](#).

OTIS is currently conducting studies looking at [asthma](#) and [autoimmune diseases](#) and the medications used to treat these diseases in pregnancy. If you are interested in taking part in one of these studies, please call 1-877-311-8972.

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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**.*