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Phentermine and Pregnancy

This sheet talks about the risks that exposure to phentermine 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 phentermine?

Phentermine is a medication used as an appetite suppressant to treat obesity. Women are sometimes prescribed medications such as phentermine to assist them in losing weight. Phentermine stimulates the brain. It is also known as Adipex[®], Fastin[®], Ionamin[®], and Zantryl[®].

Is phentermine the same as Fen-Phen?

No. Fen-Phen was a medication made of phentermine and fenfluramine prescribed to help people lose weight. Fenfluramine was taken off of the market in September 1997 because of the concern that it caused heart problems when used. Since then, Fen-Phen has been unavailable. Phentermine, however, continues to remain on the market.

Is it safe to lose weight while I'm pregnant?

Some medical complications are more likely in pregnancy if you are significantly overweight, including gestational diabetes (diabetes that develops and lasts only during pregnancy) and high blood pressure. Your health care provider can discuss recommendations regarding weight gain and loss during pregnancy, but in general, it is not recommended that you lose weight during pregnancy. Some studies suggest that dieting during early pregnancy, without taking vitamins, may increase the risk of having a baby with a neural tube defect. Neural tube defects, such as spina bifida, occur when the baby's spine does not close properly.

Can taking phentermine make it harder for me to get pregnant?

There is no information about whether phentermine makes it more difficult for women to become pregnant.

I took phentermine for several months but stopped three months ago. I just found out I'm two months pregnant. Will my baby be ok?

Your baby was not actually exposed to the phentermine that you took. Although the rate at which phentermine is broken down in the body varies from person to person, most of the phentermine should be gone from a person's body four to five days after taking the last dose. Phentermine is well absorbed in the body, and the body gets rid of the medication easily. Therefore, the phentermine would have been gone from your body before you became pregnant.

I've been using phentermine for the past month and just found out I'm 2 months pregnant. Is my baby ok?

There is little information on phentermine exposures during early pregnancy, but there is some information that looks at women who used Fen-Phen during the first trimester of pregnancy. This information shows no increase in the rate of birth defects. Furthermore, there was no pattern to the birth defects present. The existence of a pattern in birth defects is important because if a medication were thought to cause birth defects, it would be expected to produce the same birth defects consistently. If there is no consistency,

then it is not likely the medication is responsible.

I used phentermine before I knew I was pregnant and am concerned about my baby. Are there any tests I could have to make sure my baby is ok?

An ultrasound examination can often be used to determine if the baby has physical birth defects. An ultrasound examination, also called a sonogram, allows a health care provider to “see” many things, including the baby’s head and spine. Ultrasound may not be able to pick up all birth defects, however. You may also want to talk with your health care provider about the MSAFP test (maternal serum alpha fetoprotein test), which can detect many neural tube defects.

Now that I know I’m pregnant, can I stop taking the phentermine immediately?

Phentermine has not been associated with negative side effects when people stop taking it immediately. Therefore, a person could stop taking phentermine at any time. Some appetite suppressants, such as fenfluramine, need to be slowly stopped over a period of several days to avoid negative side effects. You should, however, talk with your health care provider before discontinuing any prescription medication.

I’ve heard Fen-Phen causes heart problems in adults. Will phentermine do the same to my baby?

Fenfluramine, as part of Fen-Phen, is thought to cause reversible heart problems in adults. There are no specific studies examining whether phentermine affects the developing baby’s heart. The limited available information suggests it would be unlikely for phentermine to cause these same types of heart defects in babies exposed during pregnancy.

I gained a lot of weight while I was pregnant. I am thinking of using phentermine to lose the weight. Can I still breastfeed my baby?

It is possible for phentermine to pass into breast milk, so a baby could be exposed while nursing. We do not know how much

phentermine gets into breast milk, or what effects it can have on a baby who is breastfed. Because phentermine stimulates the brain, it might cause side effects in the baby such as tremors, agitation or decreased feeding. You should talk with your health care provider about breastfeeding if taking this medication.

What if the father of the baby uses phentermine?

There are no studies looking at possible risks to a pregnancy when the father uses phentermine. 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*.

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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.