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Prozac (fluoxetine) and Pregnancy

The information below will help you determine if your prenatal exposure to Prozac represents an increased fetal risk. With every pregnancy, all women have a 3 to 5 percent chance to have a baby with a birth defect.

What is Prozac?

Prozac is a medication commonly used to treat depression. Prozac is also used to treat obsessive-compulsive disorders and eating disorders (bulimia nervosa). The generic name of Prozac is fluoxetine.

I am taking Prozac, but I would like to stop taking it before becoming pregnant. How long does Prozac stay in your body?

The liver breaks down Prozac. Each individual's ability to break down the medication is different. On average, Prozac has a half-life (time it takes to eliminate one half of the drug from the body) of two to three days, but may be found in your system for several weeks after you stop taking it. Studies have shown that the levels are fairly low after one to two weeks. An active metabolite of Prozac called norfluoxetine has a half-life of seven to sixteen days, but can remain in the body for a much longer time period. Please talk to your doctor before you stop taking Prozac. The benefits of taking the medication for your specific situation, and any possible adverse outcomes of not taking it, should be discussed with your doctor.

Can taking Prozac make it more difficult for me to become pregnant?

Animal studies have not shown any effect on fertility with the use of Prozac. There have been reports of lack of orgasm or delayed orgasm in women and men who take Prozac. There have also been reports of women who have had infertility problems, and who developed regular periods and ovulation after being treated with Prozac. Further studies are needed to determine Prozac's effect on fertility.

Can taking Prozac during my pregnancy cause birth defects?

Prozac is one of the better-studied antidepressants in pregnancy. There are reports of nearly 2,000 pregnancies exposed to Prozac during

the first trimester. No study found an increased risk for major structural birth defects (those requiring surgery or reducing function). One study has identified an increased rate of three or more minor birth defects (those not medically or functionally significant) among children exposed to Prozac in the first trimester. When three or more minor birth defects are seen together, a major birth defect (including learning problems) occurs more often, although this was not seen in the Prozac study.

Will taking Prozac have any effect on my baby's behavior and development?

Studies have begun to look at the possible long-term effects on infants exposed to Prozac during pregnancy. Prozac affects the mother by changing chemical levels in the brain. These changes could also have an effect on fetal brain development. Two studies examining development in children at 16 months to 7 years of age, did not find differences between exposed and unexposed children. These studies are reassuring; however, more studies are needed before we can be certain of the effects on the fetal brain.

I have heard that Prozac can cause a miscarriage. Is this true?

Although not conclusive, there does not appear to be an increased risk for miscarriage with the use of Prozac in pregnancy. One study did suggest an increased risk for miscarriage, but this was thought to be related to the maternal depressive disorder itself.

I need to take Prozac throughout my entire pregnancy. Will it cause withdrawal symptoms in my baby?

Since the drug has a long half-life, it is unlikely that there is a withdrawal effect. Most infants exposed to Prozac during the last three months of pregnancy do not have problems. Some newborns exposed to Prozac during the last few months of pregnancy have had irritability, continuous crying, tremors, increased or decreased muscle tone, breathing

problems and other problems after birth. These symptoms typically disappear within the first week of life and are not considered life threatening.

Are there any other problems Prozac can cause when used in the third trimester?

Further research is needed to answer this question. One study found that third trimester use of Prozac compared to first trimester use increased the chances for premature delivery, higher rates of care in the newborn special-care nursery, and lower birth weight and length. In this study, women who stopped using Prozac by the end of the second trimester do not seem to be at an increased risk for these problems. Another study did not confirm these findings. Studies have shown that prematurity and other pregnancy complications may be related to the maternal depressive disorder itself rather than to the medication exposure.

Some people who take Prozac may experience increased bruising. There has been a similar effect seen in a newborn whose mother took Prozac throughout the pregnancy.

Should I stop taking Prozac during my pregnancy?

In order to receive the most thorough care during pregnancy, you should contact your health care provider before making any changes in medication or stopping use any time during pregnancy. The benefits of taking Prozac for your specific situation, and the potential risks to the baby, should be considered before a decision is made.

Can I take Prozac while breastfeeding?

Information regarding the use of Prozac while breastfeeding is limited. Prozac and its breakdown product, norfluoxetine, are found in breastmilk in amounts estimated to be 10 to 20 percent of the amount of the drug in the mother's blood.

There are several case reports and a case series regarding the use of Prozac during breastfeeding. Most reports found no adverse effects. However, in a small number of cases, irritability, vomiting, diarrhea, and/or decreased sleep were seen in newborns. These symptoms were thought to be due to the mother's use of Prozac while breastfeeding. One study noted a slight decrease in weight gain; however, this decrease would likely only be of significance if the infant's weight gain were already of concern. Long-term studies on infants

exposed to Prozac in breast milk have not been completed.

The conclusion of the Committee on Drugs of the American Academy of Pediatrics is that antidepressants are "drugs whose effect on nursing infants is unknown but may be of concern". Please talk to your health care provider if you wish to breastfeed while taking Prozac.

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