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Retin-A and Pregnancy

The information below will help you determine if the use of Retin-A 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.

Retin-A (tretinoin)

What is Retin-A?

Retin-A is a cream that is applied to the skin and used to treat acne and other skin problems. The generic name of Retin-A is tretinoin. This drug belongs to a group of medications called the retinoids; all of these medications are related to Vitamin A. Other medications in the retinoid family are Accutane (isotretinoin), Differin gel (adapalene), and etretinate.

My doctor said that Retin-A is like Accutane, and I've heard that Accutane causes birth defects. Can using Retin-A during pregnancy cause birth defects?

When women take Accutane in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, certain birth defects can occur. For this reason, health care professionals suggest that women not take Accutane during pregnancy. Accutane, however, is taken by mouth. It enters the mother's bloodstream and is then passed on to the baby.

Retin-A is different. It is applied to the skin. Usually, less than 10% of Retin-A passes into the mother's bloodstream, and even less reaches the baby. Broken skin, using more than is needed on an area, or use on a large area will cause more of the Retin-A to pass through the skin. In general, the less Retin-A that is used on the mother's skin, the less likely there will be risks to the baby.

I have acne. Can I use Retin-A while I'm pregnant?

Several studies have tried to find out the effects of Retin-A on pregnancy. These studies have not found that babies whose mothers used Retin-A during pregnancy are any more likely to have birth defects than babies whose mothers did not use Retin-A.

There have been two reports of babies born with birth defects after their mothers used Retin-A during pregnancy. Usually, one or two reports does not cause health professionals to worry, but the birth defects reported in these two cases are like the defects seen in babies whose mothers took Accutane during pregnancy. Since Retin-A and Accutane are related, it is possible that these two medications can affect the baby in the same way. But, because many women use Retin-A during pregnancy and there are only these two reports, the risk for the same kinds of birth defects is probably low. However, it may be a good idea not to use Retin-A in pregnancy due to the possible risks.

I am using Retin-A now, but would like to stop using it before becoming pregnant. How long should I wait after I stop using it before I try to get pregnant?

Retin-A stays in the body for about one week after you stop using it. The makers of Accutane suggest that women stop using it one month before trying to get pregnant. Based on this suggestion for Accutane, a safe approach would be to stop using Retin-A one month before trying to get pregnant.

Can Retin-A make it more difficult for me to get pregnant?

To date, we do not know whether use of Retin-A makes it harder for women to become pregnant.

If I stop using Retin-A in the first third, is it okay to start using it again in the last two thirds of my pregnancy?

During the first three months of pregnancy, the baby's organs are forming. In months four through nine, the baby is growing and its brain is growing, too. It is expected that any effect Retin-A has would be like the effect of Accutane on a pregnancy. Since Accutane acts on the organs that are forming during the fourth to seventh week of pregnancy, we expect that any effects of Retin-A would happen during the same time. However, because no studies have been done to look at Retin-A's effect on the brain of children as they get older, you may want to ask your doctor about using a different medication during the whole pregnancy. If you do use Retin-A in the last two-thirds of your pregnancy, any increased risk is likely to be small.

Are there any tests available to find out if the medication has affected my pregnancy?

Ultrasounds can be done to look at the way the baby's organs have formed and the growth of the baby, but not all birth defects can be found by ultrasound. Other tests done during pregnancy, such as chorionic villi sampling and amniocentesis, cannot find birth defects caused by a medication.

Can I use Retin-A while I am breastfeeding?

When used on your skin, it is known that very little Retin-A passes into your body, and so the amount in breast milk would probably be very little to none. There have not been reports of problems in nursing babies when the mothers are using Retin-A. However, the American

Academy of Pediatrics has not yet studied the use of Retin-A for breastfeeding. You may wish to talk to your health care provider about any concerns you have.

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