

PREGNANCY & MEDICATIONS



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

- Medications taken by pregnant women can cross the placenta and reach the fetus and possibly cause birth defects, particularly in the first 3 months when fetal organs are being formed. Therefore, it is important that a pregnant woman take only medications considered essential and that she understand their risks and benefits. Sometimes, the risk of the illness has to be weighed against the known or unknown risk of the medication as illnesses and infections may cause fetal problems also.
- There are many drugs that have been used safely in pregnancy. Once you have made certain a medication is safe and have the doctor's approval, don't hold off in taking it. The earlier treatment begins for most infections or disorders, the better the chances are for a faster, uncomplicated recovery.
- Frequently, a woman has taken a prescription or nonprescription medication even before she realizes she has missed a menstrual period and may be pregnant. Always discuss this with the doctor at your first prenatal examination. Be sure you know the name of the medication, the dosage amount, length of time you took it, and if you had any side effects. This also includes any herbal products or homeopathic treatments you have used.
- With some chronic conditions, prescribed medications that carry some risks may need to be taken to control the disorder despite the pregnancy. In these situations, doctors will attempt to prescribe the lowest dose possible for effective treatment and reduce risks to the fetus. It is important to adhere to the dosage schedule and to advise the doctor if symptoms are not being controlled.
- There are many herbal remedies on the market that claim to treat a variety of medical problems and prevent others. It is important to recognize that these remedies contain chemicals just like drugs do and can present risks to the fetus. The majority of these products are not regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Don't use any of these products without the doctor's approval.

TERATOGENESIS

Teratology is the science dealing with the structural, functional, and behavioral abnormalities of offspring. A teratogen is an agent that causes abnormalities (birth defects) in a developing embryo or fetus. Examples are rubella virus (German measles) and the drug thalidomide. If a drug is classified as a teratogen, there must be evidence that taking the drug during pregnancy causes congenital abnormalities that cannot be explained by other factors.

HOW DRUGS ARE RATED FOR RISK IN PREGNANCY

- A pregnancy risk category is assigned to individual medications and identifies the potential risk for that particular drug to cause birth defects or death to the unborn child (fetus). These categories are assigned by applying the definitions of the FDA to the available clinical information about the drug. Most drugs are tested only on animals and not on humans for safety during pregnancy because such testing would subject unborn children to unnecessary risks.
- All drugs are best avoided during pregnancy, but this rating system can help your doctor begin to assess the risk-to-benefit ratio should drug treatment become necessary. You and your doctor should discuss these benefits and risks carefully before any drug treatment is initiated.

PREGNANCY RISK CATEGORY

Definition of the drug categories (A, B, C, D, and X):

- A: Adequate studies in pregnant women have failed to show a risk to the fetus in the first trimester of pregnancy and there is no evidence of risk in later trimesters.
- B: Animal studies have not shown an adverse effect on the fetus, but there are no adequate studies in pregnant women; or animal studies have shown an adverse effect on the fetus, but adequate studies in pregnant women have not shown a risk to the fetus.
- C: Animal studies have shown an adverse effect on the fetus, but there are no adequate studies in humans; or there are no studies in animals or women. The drug may be used for pregnant women because of the benefits and despite its potential risk.
- D: There is evidence of risk to the human fetus, but the potential benefits of use in pregnant women may be acceptable despite potential risks (e.g., life-threatening situation or for a serious disease for which safer drugs cannot be used or are ineffective).
- X: Studies in animals and humans show fetal abnormalities, or reports of adverse reactions indicate evidence of fetal risk. The risks involved clearly outweigh potential benefits and the drug is contraindicated for pregnant women.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You are pregnant (or trying to conceive) and want to know about taking a prescription or nonprescription drug that has not been discussed with the doctor. This includes cold medications, headache or pain remedies, laxatives, antihistamines, anti-nausea drugs and any herbal remedies. Don't treat yourself.
- You experience side effects from a prescription or nonprescription medication.