



Medicine and pregnancy: what you need to know

If you need to start, stop or change any medicine when you are pregnant, talk to your doctor about how to keep you and your baby safe.

Can you take medicine when you are pregnant?

You might need to take medicine when you're pregnant. You should speak to your doctor before you:

- start taking any new medicine.
- change or stop taking any medicine.

Medicine is what you take when you feel sick, to treat or prevent illness. There are different types of medicine.

Prescription medicine

You need a script from your doctor, dentist or other health professional to get prescription medicine.

Over-the-counter medicine

You don't need a script to buy over-the-counter medicine at pharmacies, supermarkets or health food stores.

Herbal medicine

Please see our factsheet called *Herbal medicine in pregnancy and breastfeeding* for information about herbal and traditional medicines.

Your doctor can explain what is safe for you and your baby. Most medicine can go through your body to your baby during pregnancy. Your doctor will:

- explain the risks and benefits.
- give you advice about other treatment or medicine.

Can you use over-the-counter medicine when you are pregnant?

It is important to know if there are risks before you take over-the-counter medicine when you are pregnant.

This factsheet has information about common over-the-counter medicine. You should check with your doctor or pharmacist before you take over-the-counter medicine.

What can you take for aches and pain?

You can take the recommended dose of paracetamol for:

- mild pain
- headaches
- toothaches
- muscle pain
- reducing a fever.

You shouldn't use non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen or diclofenac when you are pregnant. They can harm your baby, especially after 30 weeks. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

What can you take for allergies and hayfever?

If you have allergies or hayfever, you might have:

- a runny and blocked nose
- be sneezing
- itchy nose, eyes, ears or throat
- watery, red irritated eyes.

Try to avoid things that make your symptoms worse, like pollen, dust, animals.

Antihistamines

You can use antihistamines that make you sleepy when you are pregnant. You can use the recommended dose of antihistamines like chlorpheniramine, cyproheptadine, dexchlorpheniramine, doxylamine, pheniramine and promethazine.

Antihistamines that don't make you sleepy can also be used during pregnancy. Loratadine are considered safe to use during pregnancy at the recommended dose.

Eye Drops

You can use topical eye drops for allergies and hayfever like:

- Azelastine
- Ketotifen
- Levocabastine
- Olopatadine

You should only use the lowest dose for a short time when you are pregnant.

To make sure less medicine goes from your eye drops into your body, you can:

- press near the inner corner of your eye, over the tear duct, for 1 to 2 minutes.
- blot away any excess eye drops after you put the drops in.

There might be other eye drops you can use. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.

Nasal Sprays

You can use corticosteroid nasal sprays that have beclomethasone and budesonide.

Only use decongestant nasal sprays if corticosteroid nasal sprays didn't help your symptoms.

What can you take for cold and flu?

If you are feeling very sick because of a cold, the flu or sinus problems, you should contact your doctor.

The common cold is caused by a virus. You can treat the symptoms of your cold or flu.

Cough

For a dry cough, you can take a cough suppressant like dextromethorphan or dihydrocodeine. Only use the recommended dose and don't take it for very long.

For a chesty or productive cough, you can take an expectorant like guaifenesin, or a mucolytic like bromhexine at the recommended dose.

Nasal symptoms

Don't use oral decongestants like pseudoephedrine or phenylephrine.

To help your blocked nose, you can use steam inhalations and sodium chloride 0.9% nasal drops or sprays.

You can use a decongestant nasal spray that has oxymetazoline, xylometazoline or tramazoline for up to 3 days. Your symptoms might get worse if you use it for too long.

Sore throat

You can use the recommended dose of throat lozenges that have local anaesthetic or antibacterial agents. Too many lozenges can cause diarrhoea.

Don't use any products with benzydamine unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

To help your sore throat, you can gargle salt water or drink lemon and honey.

Don't use throat gargles that have povidone-iodine because it can be bad for you and your baby's thyroid function.

What can you use for cold sores?

You can:

- put ice on the cold sore.
- use lip balm to keep your lip moist.
- use aciclovir cream at the recommended doses.

Don't use famciclovir tablets when you are pregnant. You can talk to your doctor if your cold sore is severe or you need prescription medicine.

To prevent cold sores, you can:

- use lip-balm with SPF 15+
- avoid too much sun and wind exposure
- avoid injury to your lips or skin.

What can you take for constipation?

Before you take any medicine:

- eat more fibre, like fruit, vegetables, cereals
- drink plenty of water.

You can talk to a dietitian for food advice. If you need a laxative, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

You can use stool (poo) softeners like docusate. You can also use osmotic laxatives like lactulose, glycerol or macrogol. Only use the recommended doses.

You can use bulk forming laxatives that contain ispaghula, bran or methylcellulose, to help your bowel and gut muscles work better.

Don't use stimulant laxatives like senna or bisacodyl for very long. These can cause problems for your bowels. Talk to your doctor before using a laxative.

What can you take for diarrhoea?

Usually you won't have diarrhoea for very long, so you don't need to take medicine.

You should take oral rehydration solutions to replace your loss of fluid and electrolytes.

Don't use loperamide in your first trimester. You might be able to use loperamide in your second or third trimester if your doctor says it is okay.

You should see your doctor if:

- your diarrhoea is profuse, watery, bloody.
- you have other symptoms like fever or severe stomach pain.
- you've had diarrhoea for over 48 hours.

What can you take for heartburn?

80% of people get heartburn and gastro-oesophageal reflux disease when they are pregnant. Your pregnancy hormones change how your body lets acid go from your stomach to your oesophagus.

You can try changes to your diet and lifestyle to relieve mild symptoms. You can:

- eat small, frequent meals.
- avoid rich or spicy meals, chocolate, citrus and coffee.
- avoid lying down straight after a meal
- avoid eating late at night.

You can use an antacid to ease discomfort. You should talk to your pharmacist or doctor if symptoms don't improve.

What can you use to treat head lice or nits?

You can use a head lice comb and conditioner. Use comb and conditioner every second day until you haven't found any living lice for 10 days. Wash all your clothes and bedding in hot water.

You can use topical treatments that have dimeticone or pyrethrin/piperonyl butoxide. You can ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice. You should repeat the treatment after 7 days to kill any new lice.

Check all your family and close contacts for head lice. If anyone has lice, they should do treatment at the same time to stop other people getting lice.

What can you use for scabies?

You should talk to your doctor if you think you have scabies. You can use permethrin.

Make sure people in your house, your family and close contacts do treatment at the same time to stop other people getting scabies. They should be treated even if they don't have symptoms.

What can you use for mouth ulcers?

Most mouth ulcers will heal by themselves. Some over-the-counter creams or gels may be used to ease the pain or discomfort.

You can use creams and protective pastes that have carmellose, gelatin or pectin when you are pregnant. Don't use products with salicylic acid or benzydamine unless your doctor says it is okay.

What can you use for vaginal thrush?

Vaginal thrush is one of the most common fungal infections during pregnancy. You can use topical antifungal creams and pessaries that have clotrimazole or nystatin.

You might choose to use the pessaries or cream (without using the applicator) in late pregnancy. You might choose to do a 6-day course of clotrimazole as it is more effective rather than a shorter course.

You shouldn't have oral fluconazole when you are pregnant unless your doctor says it's okay. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

What can you use for haemorrhoids?

You can use anorectal ointments or suppositories when you are pregnant. To avoid getting haemorrhoids you can:

- eat more fibre, like fruit, vegetables, cereals
- drink plenty of water.

What can you use for threadworm infections?

Make sure you wash your hands and nails thoroughly with soap and water:

- after going to the toilet.
- before preparing food.
- before eating food.
- after changing nappies.

You can use pyrantel to treat worm infections when you are pregnant. Make sure people in your house do treatment at the same time. They should be treated even if they don't have symptoms.

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you still have symptoms after two weeks. To prevent another worm infection:

- keep your fingernails short
- don't bite your nails or scratch your bottom
- have a bath or shower every day
- wash your sheets, bedding, and pyjamas in hot water to kill any pinworm eggs
- clean the toilet regularly with disinfectant.

Family Violence Support 1800 Respect National Helpline

You can call any time of day or night.
1800 737 732
1800respect.org.au

Do you need an interpreter?



If you need an interpreter, you can ask for one.

For more information Medicines Information Service

9 am to 4 pm, Monday to Friday
(03) 8345 3190
drug.information@thewomens.org.au

Pharmacy Department

Level 1, The Royal Women's Hospital
20 Flemington Road
Parkville VIC 3052

Other fact sheets

You can find other factsheets on our website:
thewomens.org.au/fact-sheets