

# Medications During Pregnancy

## Budge Clinic Obstetrics and Gynecology

The most common question we encounter over the phone is “What medication can I use during a pregnancy?” This document is to help answer such questions.

As a general rule, we would like to avoid most drugs or chemicals as much as possible during a pregnancy, especially during the first trimester. If you use caffeinated beverages, biologically active herbal preparations, or work with hazardous materials, we prefer that you avoid all of these during a pregnancy. And, of course, tobacco and alcohol are high on the list of things to avoid during a pregnancy.

Those **herbs** many of you use are probably safe. But the problem is that they are not manufactured under the same FDA oversight as the drugs. There can be a lot of variability in their content, and few or none of them have been subjected to any studies for safety in pregnancy. So, I list them as things best left alone during a pregnancy.

### **Common medications for common situations:**

**Tylenol** can be used for headaches and for the aches and pains associated with viral illnesses. It is safe to use if you stick to the recommended dosage. Tylenol is toxic to the liver in too high doses. I would not like to see it used day after day. If any kind of pain is persistent, check in with us.

**Ibuprofen** can be used in doses of 400 mg every six hours for pain. It is usually not recommended for use after 28 weeks. You can use it in combination with Tylenol. But, do not use it with aspirin.

**Aspirin** is usually best avoided during a pregnancy. It has an anti-platelet effect that can increase bleeding. (However there are certain conditions that are treated with aspirin during a pregnancy.) So, don't use it unless it is recommended by your healthcare provider.

**Caffeine** is a component of some headache remedies such as Excedrin and Fiorinal. Naturally, it is found in coffee and is added to many soft drinks. It is listed as a Category C in pregnancy. So, typically is not recommended to be used in pregnancy except to treat the occasional headache. Please consult with your doctor about appropriate intake of caffeine.

**Sudafed (pseudo ephedrine)** can be used for a stuffy nose due to a cold or allergies. It is found in many over the counter preparations. (Quantities purchased of this medication are limited by law not because of safety concerns, but because it is one of the ingredients used in illegal labs to manufacture methamphetamine.)

**Actifed** can be used for stuffy nose due to colds or allergies. It is Sudafed, plus, an antihistamine that can make you drowsy.

**Robitussin (guaifenesin)** can be used for a cough. It is an expectorant, which means it makes it easier to clear the phlegm from the airway. It will not cure the cough.

**Claritin (loratadine) & Zyrtec (Cetirizine)** can be used for hay fever and allergies as needed.

**Benadryl (diphenhydramine)** is an antihistamine that can be used to treat hay fever and allergies. It can make you very drowsy, and so it is also found in certain over the counter sleeping aids, such as Tylenol PM.

**Pepto-Bismol** contains bismuth, which is more toxic and is better avoided during a pregnancy.

**Imodium** can be used for simple uncomplicated diarrhea. If the problem is severe or is not clearing up after a couple of days, you should call our office.

**Antacids** such as Tums, Mylanta, Gaviscon, etc. can be used as needed for heartburn, and acid indigestion. You should follow the recommended doses.

**Pepcid, Tagamet and Zantac** which inhibit acid production in the stomach, may also be used along with the antacids for upper gastrointestinal complaints, if the antacids alone aren't enough. Any severe and persistent severe abdominal pain needs to be evaluated.

**Laxatives** are often needed since constipation is a common complaint in pregnancy. Milk of Magnesia and Miralax (polyethylene glycol) are osmotic laxatives that are confined to the bowel and do not circulate in the blood stream to the fetus. They can be used as needed. Smooth muscle stimulators such as cascara, castor oil, ex lax or senokot (senna), dulcolax (bisacodyl) etc. should be avoided. They can stimulate uterine activity and actually creates a form of gastrointestinal dependence triggering chronic use. If chronic constipation seems to become a regular problem, it is best prevented with regular daily use of fiber laxatives (which also do not circulate). These include all forms of psyllium based products, such as Metamucil and Fibercon and other fibers such as Citrucel (methylcellulose). Stool softeners such as Colace can be used as needed also.

## **Just FYI:**

Drugs in pregnancy are grouped into 4 main categories or groups.

**Category A and B:** These are the medications that are known to be safe during any stage of pregnancy (A), or which are safe in the second and third trimesters but insufficiently studied in the first trimester, but with no evidence of any harm (B). Category A seems to be a very short list. Many drugs that used to be there, such as penicillin G, have been moved into the B list). Category B includes antibiotics such as the penicillins, cephalosporins (such as keflex or ceftin), and macrolid. Most over the counter medications are category B. Most all of these will have a disclaimer in the package insert that says something like: "If you are pregnant, consult your physician before using." Those are put there for legal cover for the manufacturer. They can be used when needed. You should never exceed the recommended dosage, and discontinue them as soon as you can.

**Category C** includes most prescription drugs. These are drugs that, to date, have no evidence found that they cause any harm in human pregnancy. But they have not been sufficiently well studied to say that they never can cause problems. These drugs are used in pregnancy only when necessary, and the benefits seem to outweigh any potential risks. You should make sure that any provider who prescribes something for you is aware that you are pregnant.

**Category D** includes medications which are known to pose certain risks in pregnancy, but which may be used in certain urgent situations. This would include some medications that are used to control seizures, for instance.

**Category X** is the group of medications, which are so dangerous to the fetus that they should not be used at all, an example is acutane.