

A handy fact sheet on promethazine in pregnancy and breastfeeding

This fact sheet should be read alongside our other Choice and Medication leaflets, which include more information on this medicine and its side effects

What should I do if I am taking promethazine and want to start a family?

The best option is always to plan in advance. If you plan to start a family, talk about this with your prescriber.

Promethazine is not known to affect fertility but there is little information about this.

Depending on your situation, you may be able to:

- **Continue taking promethazine** as this is usually a first choice in pregnancy
- **Adjust your dose**, but only with advice from your prescriber
- **Switch to another medicine**
- **Stop medicines you no longer need** to reduce any avoidable risks.

Promethazine is commonly used in pregnancy for nausea and vomiting as well as for sleep, so we have lots of information about its use in pregnancy (over 15,000 published cases).

If sleep is a problem, have a look at our leaflet on 'sleep hygiene' which has some ideas on sleeping better.

I have just found out I am pregnant – should I stop taking promethazine?

- You do **not** need to stop promethazine immediately, as your baby has already been exposed to promethazine
- Speak to your prescriber within the next day or two to talk about your options
- Together, you can decide on a plan that works best for you. You may need some time to review the information and make an informed choice. This can help guide your decision
- If you and your prescriber decide that stopping promethazine is the best option, you can usually stop it suddenly or reduce the dose gradually over several weeks
- If you are only taking promethazine when you need it, rather than regularly every night, you should have no problems stopping it
- You might want to go back on promethazine again after your baby has been born.

What are the risks if I carry on taking promethazine during early pregnancy?

- **First trimester (i.e. months 1-3)** is when your baby's organs are developing
- Promethazine is one of the safer medicines to take during pregnancy as we have much experience of using it for various conditions in pregnancy (hay fever, insomnia, nausea and vomiting) over a long period of time
- There is a good amount of data showing that promethazine is **not** linked to an increased risk of malformation, having a baby born early, low birth weight or any impact on baby brain development if you take usual doses
- One study on antihistamines (including promethazine) did not show an increased risk of miscarriage.

What about later on in pregnancy?

- During the second and third trimesters your body changes a lot. There is no good evidence that most people need a dose change for promethazine, but if your symptoms get worse, see your prescriber so to review things
- There does **not** seem to be a clear link with effects on infant birth weights when the usual doses of promethazine have been taken, so extra monitoring is not usually needed.

What about delivery time?

- There is very little information about how promethazine might affect babies around the time of birth
- In the UK the official recommendation is to avoid use in the last two weeks of pregnancy, because babies exposed close to delivery may be irritable or unsettled after birth
- If you take promethazine every night in the weeks before delivery, some babies may have short-term discontinuation symptoms. These can include being irritable, crying a lot, or having problems feeding or sleeping
- These symptoms are usually mild, do not need treatment, and settle within a few days

- If you have taken promethazine in the hours before delivery, it may be best to give birth in a hospital, where we can monitor and care for your baby after birth
- If you think you may need to take promethazine near the end of pregnancy, speak to your midwife or prescriber, so plans can be made for delivery and any monitoring your baby might need
- If you carry on taking promethazine while breastfeeding, this may help reduce discontinuation symptoms, as small amounts can pass into breast milk.

Is breastfeeding safe while taking promethazine?

- Promethazine is considered low risk when breastfeeding
- Only small amounts pass into breast milk, and occasional short-term use is unlikely to cause problems for most babies
- If you take promethazine every night, watch your baby for extra sleepiness or feeding difficulties, and seek advice if you are concerned
- An older, small study, seemed to show that taking promethazine may lead to lower levels of prolactin (a hormone needed to help start milk production)
 - This *might* make it harder to get breastfeeding started if you take it before the milk supply gets going
 - This is less likely to be a problem if you only take promethazine every few days, or once breastfeeding is well established
- If your baby was born early (pre-term) or has health problems, ask a healthcare professional for advice before taking promethazine
- Promethazine can make you feel very sleepy, so it is not recommended to share a bed with your baby if you have taken a dose
- You may want to plan extra overnight support (e.g. a partner helping with feeds using expressed

milk) if promethazine makes you really sleepy.

What about later on and baby's development?

- Taking promethazine throughout pregnancy and breastfeeding does not seem to have any effects on physical or mental development or behaviour over the first years of the child's life.

What else can I do to help myself stay well?

- Consider **talking therapies**, which can be helpful on their own or alongside medication
- Avoid taking medications you don't really need. **Check with a pharmacist** before using over-the-counter medicines
- Eat a **healthy, balanced diet** with plenty of fruits and vegetables
- Stay active with regular exercise, as recommended by your healthcare provider
- **Drink enough water** to stay hydrated, especially if you feel thirsty
- If you get morning sickness, you may be at higher risk of dehydration. Drink plenty of fluids and speak to your doctor. There are treatments that can help
- Ask your healthcare team if you need any other vitamin supplements, such as iron or vitamin D
- Attend for any recommended blood tests or health check-ups
- If you are feeling stressed, try non-medication ways to relax. Make sure you try to spot the differences between normal pregnancy changes and signs of becoming unwell
- Build a support network of people who can help you recognise if you are struggling and offer support when needed.

Remember:

Babies do better with well mums

Make your own notes here. Write down some questions you may want to ask your health care team

The small print: This leaflet is to help you understand more about promethazine and pregnancy. You **must** also read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). Go to our website for fuller answers to many other questions.

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